



## Kids and the VA

### Civil War School Day

The Campus of the **Milwaukee VA Medical Center** has returned to its "normal look" following the seventh annual Reclaiming Our Heritage May 31-June 1. Gone are the tents, the piles of firewood and the re-enactors in period dress walking the streets of the campus. The annual event, held the first weekend following Memorial Day, is a living history encampment celebrating U.S. history from the 1600's to the present. It is free and open to the public.



A record number of people lined the Patriotic Parade route or took the trip back in time on the Cemetery-by-Lantern Tour. But, the day before the big weekend is for the kids.

Early on Friday morning –*with personalized enlistment papers and Civil War caps upon their heads, companies of second and fifth-grade students experienced soldier and civilian life in the 1860s.* It was Civil War School Day and almost 600 kids had an adventure of monstrous proportions. The students came from 10 schools and 11 who were home schooled.

Kris L. Kemnitz, a human resources specialist, coordinated the many events going on that day with 10 employees and 50 re-enactors. "It is not just a field trip. It is showing them their history... showing them how their freedom started." Planning by Mrs. Kemnitz and her adult troop started a year before the actual event. "Civil War School Day offers students hands-on experiences of 19th-century military and civilian life."

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The day began at 9:15 a.m. with a welcome by Major General George Thomas, one of the unsung heroes of the Union Army. With the volunteer enlistment papers completed, the new recruits are sworn into Civil War regiments and then rotated through 18 stations.

The stations this year included drilling with the infantry, cavalry demonstrations, artillery demonstrations, and an introduction to the 29th U.S. Colored Troops.

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## Network News

### Hines VAH

#### Annual Wheelchair Games: An Uplifting Event

May 31<sup>st</sup> marked the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Russ Tarver Memorial Wheelchair Games at Hines VA Hospital. Opening ceremonies took place first thing in the morning outside the Spinal Cord Injury Building (Bldg. 128). Over 50 veterans lined up to watch the opening ceremonies, with the events beginning immediately thereafter. Events included bowling, air rifles, field events, table tennis, horseshoes, wheelchair rally, 25 meter race, adaptive golf, blow darts, obstacle course and billiards. Spirits of the participants, employees and volunteers were sky high as the competitions unfolded.

Special thanks to all the Hines volunteers who assisted in making this year's event a success. Event coordinators, Jill Kalkofen-Jacobsen and Bridget Collins reported that they have received extensive positive feedback from the veterans who participated in the event and from all those who were able to attend.



Numerous Hines employees, including (from left), Bill Fist, Annette Katamay and Mike Halm, volunteered to assist at this year's Wheelchair Games.

#### Transforming Care at the Bedside (TCAB)

*"It was inspirational to see the team energy, pride and creative presentations. Our nursing staff is truly phenomenal"*

Hines Nursing staff have introduced Transforming Care at the Bedside (TCAB) to all hospital staff by hosting a poster contest and presentation May 6-9 in two hospital locations. TCAB is a national initiative developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the non-profit Institute for Health Improvement. In its 5<sup>th</sup> year, TCAB is the framework for change on medical and surgical units from the bedside up. RNs are given the responsibility and power to make changes on their unit that will improve patient care in four areas including:

- Safe and Reliable Care
- Vitality and Teamwork
- Patient-Centered Care
- Value-Added Care Processes

Successful changes can then be expanded to other units, hospitals and VISNs.

Fundamentals of the plan were introduced to Hines Clinical Nurse Managers in October 2007 by Rita DuVal, Associate Director/Patient Care Services and the roll-out to nursing staff began. In early 2008 Sandra Greider and Stacy Wroblewski visited small nursing groups across the hospital elaborating on the TCAB concept and to answer staff's questions. "During our first day alone we found several groups excited to talk about their ideas to transform healthcare delivery in their unit" said Wroblewski. Ideas ranged from increasing patient compliance with their diet, initiating a "Thank you for serving our country" campaign and developing a better "latex allergy" alert system. Staff moved quickly to form teams including doctors, pharmacists and patients to begin the improvement process.

The poster contest "TCAB Nursing Challenge" was announced in March by Chairman Cecilia Beauprie, ACNS-OP Nursing. "It was inspirational to see the team

energy, pride and creative presentations. Our nursing staff is truly phenomenal” said Beauprie.

The project was a resounding success with hundreds of staff involved in 29 poster entries from 24 units across the hospital.

Congratulations to the top three winners.

**1<sup>st</sup> Place: Home Based Primary Care “Preventing Harm from Warfarin in Home Based Primary Care”**

Team leaders Rosalyn Meng, RN and Elizabeth Ribeiro, RN addressed the TCAB theme “safe and reliable care.” Elderly patients in the home taking warfarin (a blood thinner to prevent clots) pose a high risk of injury without intense monitoring. The team of pharmacy, nursing, patients and families suggested changes of separate pill dispensers for warfarin, new bottle labels, dietary consults and using only two warfarin strengths. Full transformation is expected by June 30, 2008.



Team Lead Rosalyn Meng, RN (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) displays their award with other HBPC RNs (left to right) Stacy Wroblewski, Magnet Coordinator, Cecilia Beauprie, ACNS-OP Nursing and contest chairman; Mark Foley, RN; Eleanor Taylor, RN; Jiret Saez, Nurse Manager and Rita DuVal, Associate Director/ Patient Care Services.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Medical Sub-Specialties “Clinical Reminder Monopoly”**

Team leader Sylvia Woodhouse’s group demonstrated how their unit maximized its opportunity to reach clinical reminder performance measure goals. Staff keeps informed of current scores and daily completion rates, and completes reminders by phone when a patient leaves the unit before they are done.



Medical Sub-Specialties Clinic staff (from left) Pat Beach, LPN; Rochelle Brewer, LPN; Beth Scott, RN; Marivic Gregorio, Nurse Manager with ribbon; Team Leader Sylvia Woodhouse, LPN; Chris Norten, RN and Rosemary Johnson, LPN.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place: “Safety in our Neighborhood: Building 228/ We are Watching You”**

This project includes police, EMS, FMS, social workers, therapists and all levels of unit staff. They united in the goal of making Building 228 and the surrounding area a safer environment. Transformational interventions include adding greeters, observation mirrors, more frequent police rounds and safety drills, a neighborhood newsletter, installation of an improved security system and ongoing staff education. Patients and staff report feeling more safe, police reports have increased while crime rates have decreased, patients in unauthorized areas have drastically decreased, traffic flow in Mental Health Intake Center has improved and hospital safety violations have decreased.



Stacy Wroblewski, Magnet Coordinator, presents 3<sup>rd</sup> place award to Mental Health OP Nurse Manager Dr. Nancy Harris.

## **(HANDS) Incentive**

On April 15, 2008, Hines Nursing Service hosted representatives from the VHA Nursing Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) Grant, and the Hands-On Automated Nursing Data System (HANDS) Core Project Team, in a discussion and demonstration of CPRS nursing documentation templates and the BCMA system. Guests included Oyweda Moorer, Program Director Technology/Health Systems, Office of Nursing Services, Kathryn Sappas, Associate Chief Nursing Service for Education/Research, Miami VA Medical Center, VA HANDS Principle Investigator, and from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Mary Mandeville, HANDS Project Director, and Gail Keenan, Director of Nursing Informatics Initiative.

It is the intent of the QUERI Grant to assess and develop a feasible strategy to integrate an electronic standardized care plan within the VA. HANDS as an electronic system for care planning, developed through 10 years of research that maintains standardization of documentation and communication of the plan of care, while supporting the interdisciplinary team in monitoring patient problems, interventions and progress towards outcomes. The discussion/demonstration took place in the computer lab with test patients. Guests were escorted to the Medical/Oncology Unit (9E/W) to view unit-based equipment use.



*Shirlynn Roan, Clinical Nurse Manager, Suzanne Johnson, Staff Nurse, Medical/Oncology Unit, Gail Keenan, Director of Nursing Informatics Initiative, UIC, Oyweda Moorer, Program Director, ONS, Rita A. DuVal, AD/PCS, Hines.*

Subsequent to the visit, Rita A. DuVal, Associate Director/Patient Care Services (AD/PCS), and Sharon Zandell, Chief, Education Service, Hines VA Hospital were invited to represent VA Nursing in their role as Nurse Executive and Nurse Educator on the newly formed VA HANDS Nursing Strategic Planning Committee. The charge of this committee is to identify system wide barriers and facilitators for implementing HANDS in VA facilities, develop an implementation plan and create a model and solutions for successfully implementing the HANDS system across the VA enterprise.

## **The Heart of A Marine Foundation and Illinois Lottery “Veterans Cash” Support Hines VA Rehabilitation Efforts**

Rehabilitation of patients who have suffered strokes and/or traumatic brain injuries is often a long and challenging process. Hines recently got an important donation that will make this process easier and fun for some of our veteran patients.

In late May, the Heart of A Marine Foundation based in Elk Grove Village visited Hines to deliver computers and interactive software to assist in the rehabilitation of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and stroke. Five lap top computers, 15 desk top computers, and 20 complete suites of Aphasia interactive rehabilitative software were donated. Laptops were provided to enable those in need to have 24/7 rehabilitation capabilities. “We are thrilled to be able to offer our veterans the use of this interactive software as they go through rehabilitation at Hines,” said Dr. Monica Steiner, Chief of Hines’ Rehabilitation Service. “It will be an interesting and challenging way for them to recover some of their function while having fun at the same time.”

Funding for this project was made possible through Veterans Cash. Veterans Cash is an Illinois Lottery in which proceeds go to support Illinois veterans. The Heart of A Marine Foundation received a grant from this program that purchased the computers and software.

The Heart of A Marine Foundation, a non-profit organization established to support personnel from all branches of the United States Armed Forces, veterans and their families. It was founded by Roy and Georgette Frank, who lost their son LCPL Phillip E. Frank in combat in Iraq in 2004 to honor his memory and his service. Roy summed up the importance of the day, "To see a project like this, that has the potential to help so many, is the beginning of a dream. We know that Phil is smiling down on us, and all his military brothers and sisters that we are able to help."

The Heart of A Marine Foundation is initiating a comprehensive project to assist in the rehabilitation of military personnel and veterans with TBI and stroke. The vision of the Heart of A Marine Foundation is to provide computers and Aphasia software to polytrauma units within VA hospitals across the country.

Aphasia is a loss of the ability to produce and/or comprehend language, due to injury to the brain. Brain damage can be caused by TBI, stroke, or other head injury. Aphasia interactive software has been developed to simulate the use of the brain through repetitive memory challenges, eye/hand coordination, cognitive goals, and speech therapies.

### Embracing Employee Suggestion



*Locally grown in season produce at Hines VAH Farmer's Market*

As a result of quarterly leadership lunch forums, a suggestion received from an employee, dietician, D'arcy Rea, Hines VA Hospital is now sponsoring a Farmers'

Market every Thursday 7a.m.-1p.m. from June 19<sup>th</sup> through October 2008. The market will promote good health and support local agricultural businesses featuring many varieties of locally grown produce as well as vinegars, cut flowers and plants. Many of the participating vendors are veterans themselves. Response from staff and the local community has been overwhelmingly positive.



## Iron Mountain VAMC

### A Long Awaited Dream

April 14, 2008, was an exciting day at the VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain. A special ribbon-cutting ceremony officially opened the new Nursing Home Care Unit at the VA medical center in Iron Mountain, a long-awaited dream come true.

The Iron Mountain VAMC broke ground on June 2, 2006, for the new NHCU. The project was funded at an estimated \$6 million dollars.

The existing Nursing Home Care Unit that opened on the sixth floor in 1975, occupied 9,600 square feet. The new facility increases the square footage to 23,606 with 40 beds, and the possibility of expansion to 48 beds. This will allow veterans more space, privacy, improved service for female patients, updated equipment and additional workspace for the staff.

Amenities include a courtyard, dining room, atrium, recreation room for group activities and a lounge for family visits.

The primary focus is rehabilitation, emphasizing the veteran's return to the community. The physician

director of the unit, Terry Kinzel, M.D., heads a multidisciplinary team of professionals who provide a wide spectrum of health services for the nursing home residents.



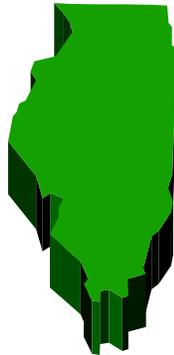
The ribbon-cutting was done by medical center Director, Michael J. Murphy, shown in the photo above. Additional attendees from left included, Jason Petti, Associate Director; Ann Fix from Congressman Bart Stupak's Office; Andrea Collins, RN, Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care Service; Craig Holmes, MD, Chief of Staff; Sandy King from Berger and King, Inc., who was the general contractor for the project; Art Ontto, Chief, Engineering Service; and Paul Johnson, with CR Meyer, who served as project manager.

## Jesse Brown VAMC

### **JBVAMC Assists Veterans to Receive State ID Cards**

***“There are veterans without State Identifications; they don’t have social security cards or birth certificates, and are unable to get them without some type of legal ID.”***

During a town hall meeting at JBVAMC in February, an employee submitted a question to medical center Director James S. Jones. “There are veterans without State Identifications; they don’t have social security cards or birth certificates, and are unable to get them without



some type of legal ID. The VA ID is not enough,” the employee said. “It is hard to help them to get things done, such as making housing arrangements, getting legal business done at the bank, getting utilities turned on, etc. Is there something that can be done to assist them?”

In response, JBVAMC's Voluntary Service arranged for the Illinois Secretary of State's Motor Vehicles office to set up in the medical center's multi-conference center on April 17 to provide State Identification Cards and other drivers' services to veterans. The response was so great that the office was invited back twice again during the month of May – once for veterans only and the other time for medical center staff.

### **Second Annual “Spirit of Jesse Brown” Award is Presented**

“There's no greater compliment I can give a person than to tell them they remind me of Jesse Brown,” said JBVAMC Director James S. Jones. “And the ‘Spirit of Jesse Brown’ Award is the most prestigious one I can present.”

The names of the recipients of the second annual Spirit of Jesse Brown Award were announced in front of a packed crowd on March 27 (the date of Jesse Brown's birthday).

#### **Non-Supervisory Recipient: Rose Bogan**

Rose Bogan started her VA career as a clerk/typist in Radiology at the West Side VA Medical Center in 1981. Since then, she has also worked in Education and Environmental Management Services. But it wasn't until she was detailed last year to her current position at the medical center's Information Desk that she truly found her niche.

Ms. Bogan approaches each situation as if the veteran is her own father, brother, mother or cousin. She makes sure veterans know where they are going and understand the information she provides by asking the veteran to repeat it back to her and taking the time to listen. She will walk a patient to their destination if

necessary and even provide a wheelchair and push them when needed.

To provide information to veterans who arrive at the medical center in the early morning, Rose volunteered to alter her tour of duty and now arrives at 6:30 a.m. every day. Receiving numerous compliments from coworkers and veterans for her pleasant and courteous attitude, Rose has been nominated for several awards for "Putting the Veteran First." She also participates in the Area Level Advocate Program, working in conjunction with the Patient Advocates to provide outstanding service to veterans at the first point of contact.

**Supervisory Recipient: Donna Leslie, Pharm.D.**

As Assistant Chief for Clinical Pharmacy, Donna Leslie is responsible for 21 clinical pharmacist specialists and assists with the training of 80 University of Illinois College of Pharmacy Pharm.D. candidates who rotate through JBVAMC annually. Also a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University, her compassionate mentoring of these students is a major reason JBVAMC Pharmacy Service has no trouble recruiting for pharmacists.

Always willing to participate wherever needed, Dr. Leslie has chaired two administrative investigative boards and is a member of the Quality Leadership Council, Pharmacy & Therapeutics Committee and the Drug Use Evaluation Committee. She serves as a Champion on the ANCHORS (medical center strategic goals) Team for Physician and Non-Physician Education, is co-chair of the Diabetes Performance Measure work group and a member of the Medication Efficiency work group.

Donna started her VA career as a pharmacy technician at Lakeside while still in school, graduated with her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy in 1992 and began working as a clinical pharmacist in anticoagulation and cardiology. She became the clinical pharmacy supervisor at Lakeside in 1998 and later the Assistant Chief for Clinical Pharmacy following the consolidation of the Lakeside and West Side Medical Centers. She is active with the VISN Pharmacy Benefits management team, has served on a number of National VA Pharmacy Workgroups and

is an active member with the Professional Women's Club of Chicago.



*From left-VISN 12 Network Director, James W. Roseborough, Rose Bogan, Dr. Donna Leslie, and medical center Director, James Jones.*

## Madison VAH

### Successful Handoffs Take a Team Effort

The VAH Madison has implemented a patient-centered nursing change of shift handoff. A good change of shift report provides for continuity of care and affects patient safety and efficiency of workflow. In the past, however, we heard comments from patients that they were "not aware of what was going on" or "what the plan was." From listening to our patients and reading the literature, we realized that our patients want to become more involved in their care. Since patients are the center of care, it is crucial to have their input during information exchange about the patient (e.g. shift handoffs). After all, who bests knows the patient than the patient himself? Furthermore, research suggests that involving patients in both the planning of their care and in the actual care leads to improved patient satisfaction, improved staff satisfaction, and improved patient safety.



The nursing staff took on the challenge of implementing a bedside nursing handoff process with patient

involvement. The old process of listening to a tape recorded report was replaced with a face-to-face report including the off-going nurse, the on-coming nurse, and **the patient**. As with any change, there were challenges to overcome and questions to answer. Who will receive the report? How will the process work? What can be said in front of the patient? How do we encourage patient involvement? Staff from all inpatient units problem-solved unforeseen roadblocks, developed a process that worked well for the various units, and established good communication methods to prevent fumbled or dropped handoffs. Our new handoff process will help achieve patient centered care goals, improve patient satisfaction, and meet our patient goals.



Totally revamping shift handoff was an exceedingly complex task that required staff participation and dedicated teamwork to successfully accomplish our goal. Team effort was the key to developing a new handoff process that is more meaningful, workable, and most importantly, patient-centered.

## VA Supplements for Ongoing Research

Research is sometimes funded in unexpected ways. This February, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) invited applications for supplements to VA grants, but gave only two weeks in which to respond. Justifying both the scientific rationale and budget for the applications wasn't easy to do in such a short amount of time.

The VAH Madison received news that nine of their supplement requests were approved. These supplements will fund studies that relate to problems confronting recently-returning as well as older veterans, including the following topics:

**Brain Injury**-Research will look at a new imaging technique for quantifying blood flow in the brain, using a cutting-edge MRI technique, as part of a study of traumatic brain injury. Treatments tailored to type of brain injury received will help veterans with combat brain injury recover.

**IV and Tube Feeding**-This work investigates how intestinal or tube feeding of critically ill or injured patients reduces the incidence of pneumonia compared with nutrition given by IV. Results will be directly relevant to Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans who survive trauma but develop respiratory complications.

**Skin cancer**-This research studies the molecular basis of an often-fatal skin cancer (a lymphoma) that is prevalent in older adults and may be linked to Agent Orange.

**Prostate cancer**-These studies evaluate the effectiveness and mechanism of dietary supplements of selenium on growth of prostate cancer.

**Diabetes**-The supplement will fund a screening of patients with late-onset diabetes, which has increased 16-fold in just 4 years. Correct diagnosis leads to immediate reassessment of treatment, especially the need for insulin.

**Tuberculosis**-The long-term goal of this research is to identify and characterize targets for new drugs to treat tuberculosis. This is especially important because some troops returning from OEF/OIF deployment have acquired new TB infections.

**Hemorrhage**-This project studies how catastrophic blood loss can lead to severe lung injury. Such loss appears to cause blood flow abnormalities in microscopic lung blood vessels.

**Bone strength**-This study seeks to identify genes affecting mechanical performance and fractures of bones different from typical osteoporosis.

**Clinical trial design**-This project aims to improve the way we evaluate diagnosis and treatments, especially of bladder cancer.

## Milwaukee VAMC

### Nordic Skiing at 84!



Milwaukee spinal cord injury veteran Russell Worth, 84, having fun as he participates in Nordic skiing (cross country) at the Winter Sports Clinic held March 30 to April 4 in Snowmass, Colorado.

Mr. Worth won the Linnie Howard Spirit Award at the Clinic. Linnie Howard attended the 1987 and 1988 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, and at 69 years old, he was the oldest participant. Mr. Howard who died in 1988, truly represented the spirit of what the clinic is all about – striving to be the best you can be with the ability you have. His spirit lives on in Mr. Worth who has been attending the Clinic since 1993.

### Next Door Neighbor Comes to Visit



*Brewers' manager, Ned Yost, signs an autograph for patient Jim Fercho in the Community Living Center at Milwaukee's VA Medical Center.*

Miller Park, home of the Brewers, is adjacent to the 196-acre medical center campus on land that at one time was part of the Old Soldiers Home. The Brewers' manager, Ned Yost, made a phone call to the medical center saying he wanted to come and visit. He

did just that a few days later, visiting patients in the intensive care unit. Ned Yost's first major league managing position and so to speak, he is a "next door neighbor." His candid conversations with the patients and staff made him a favorite of both. He said he would be back.

## North Chicago VAMC

### James Lovell Speaks at VA/DoD Planning Conference

Former astronaut and retired Navy Captain James Lovell was guest speaker at the North Chicago VA Medical Center and Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes planning conference. The two federal health care facilities will become one health care system in 2010 and be called the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center. It will be the first total integration of two federal health care centers between VA & DoD.

During Mr. Lovell's visit he presented memorabilia that will be in the new lobby of the federal health care center in 2010. Items Mr. Lovell provided were replica of American and Navy flags – both were flown on the moon; patch of Apollo 13, a portrait of Mr. Lovell and a small piece of the heat shield from Apollo 13.



*James A. Lovell holds up a Navy flag that was flown on the moon that will be in the lobby of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in 2010.*

## Tomah VAMC

### Veteran-Focused Program ‘VICTOR’

The Tomah VA opened the doors to an exciting new veteran-focused program in mid-May. The program is named, “**VICTOR.**” VICTOR stands for “**Veterans Integrated Center for Treatment Outreach and Recovery.**”

The program provides a wide variety of therapeutic, educational and recreational programming for ALL patients in one location – it will be a one-stop shop for veterans.

Examples of some of the classes and groups are: Running/Walking Club, Jobs group, WWII veterans (“The Greatest Generation”), healthy living, managing medication, boundaries, art studio, dealing with chronic pain, spirituality, relaxation skills, smoking cessation, rational thinking, cognitive games, dual diagnosis (“Double Trouble”), as well as many diversional recreation activities.

The VICTOR Center is governed by a board consisting of an equal number of VA staff and veteran consumers. The board meets monthly to discuss ways to improve the center, review applications for new groups/classes, and to hear any concerns from the veterans utilizing the center. VICTOR programming ensures that veterans have a wide variety of activities from which to choose. Veterans from throughout the facility – long term care, mental health and outpatients, will benefit from the new program.

### Remembering Departed Veterans



*Father Willis “Chappy” Everett reads scripture at a recent on-ward memorial service.*

The Tomah VA has some 200 long-term care beds. Many of the veterans cared for at the facility have lived at

the Tomah VA for many years – for them, the VA is “home” and the staff and volunteers are “family.” The staff take great pride in cultivating the family atmosphere at the facility. One way this is done is by planning memorial services twice a year to honor the memory of the veterans who passed away in the recent months. The events include music, scripture and candle lighting ceremonies. Each family receives a National Arbor Day tree sapling to plant in memory of their loved one, as well as a porcelain dove made by veterans from the PTSD program at Tomah VA. In addition to the facility-wide services, individual services are often held as well.

### Annual Fishing Tournament Hosts a Newcomer

The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Fisheree was held at the Tomah VA this past May. Sponsored by the American Legion, the veterans are brought to the VA’s pond by 110 students from the Tomah Middle School. The pond



is well-stocked by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and their staff are on hand to weigh and measure fish caught, as well as supply a mouth-watering fish fry.

A new addition this year was Harriet the eagle. Harriet and her handler, Robert Snitgen, have a special story. A Vietnam veteran, Snitgen was pretty much a recluse due to his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His wife encouraged him to visit the National Eagle Center a few miles from his home. There he met Harriet, who had been hit by a car and lost part of her wing several years ago. At the time, Harriet wasn’t expected to live. But she did and she and Snitgen have bonded. Snitgen now makes numerous public appearances as he and Harriet visit schools, and attend festivals.

## Mental Health Services In Review

The mental health and well-being of the veterans served at the Tomah VA is a top priority. During the past year, the medical center has witnessed remarkable expansion and innovation of the programs and services offered in order to better serve those who have served America so well. Here are a few highlights.



The Mental Health Triage now includes a Nurse Practitioner, Deb Frasher, NP, so that needed psychiatric medications can be promptly started. A psychologist has been added in Mental Health Triage to help ensure that veterans can receive needed crisis intervention and counseling services quickly.

The Tomah VA's OEF/OIF (Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom) Program offers a wide array of services to veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including education and outreach, assistance with benefits enrollment, assistance in expediting claims, post deployment health reassessment, comprehensive psychosocial assessment and intensive case management.

Tomah's Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC), Rhonda Chambers, monitors at risk veterans to verify that they are accessing their mental health appointments and receiving all necessary services. The SPC is also educating all Tomah VAMC staff regarding warning signs and risk factors for suicide.

Inpatient psychiatric services in both acute and extended care units are available. Outpatient mental health services are offered through the Mental Health Clinic; services include individual and group counseling, as well as medication management. Specialized services for veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma are also provided.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services offer a variety of programs aimed at helping veterans build or enhance employment skills. Incentive Therapy offers a supported work environment for those with special needs.

Compensated Work Therapy focuses on the development of skills that will prepare veterans for competitive employment. Tomah VA's Transitional Residency Program provides the bridge to fully functioning community life and employment.

Outpatients can participate in the Socialization and Support Program in an effort to help them forge friendships and expand their support systems.

The newest program is the innovative "VICTOR Center," which will provide a wide array of groups, classes and social activities designed to promote both physical and mental health, build daily life skills, enhance social supports and promote recovery.

Some of Tomah VA's mental health accomplishments "by the numbers:"

- 16,618 appointments were completed through the outpatient Mental Health Clinics in 2007
- 1625 OEF/OIF veterans have been enrolled for VA services through the OEF/OIF Program
- 44 OEF/OIF veterans are currently receiving intensive case management services
- 294 veterans were served through the PTSD, Substance Abuse and Dual Diagnosis Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs in 2007
- 249 veterans were served through the acute inpatient psychiatric units in 2007
- 93 veterans identified as being at risk for suicide have been served through the Suicide Prevention Program since its inception in November 2007
- 55 seriously mentally ill veterans are currently being served through the Mental Health Intensive Case Management Program (MHICM)

The Tomah VA will never stop looking for ways to better meet the needs of the veterans they are so privileged to serve. Staff are committed to providing veterans with the best mental health care available anywhere in the world. They deserve nothing less!

## Guitars For Vets

Thirteen veterans had Christmas come a little early in April at the Tomah VA. Each veteran was the recipient of a free guitar and five individualized guitar lessons from *Guitars for Vets*.

Milwaukee-based non-profit corporation *Guitars for Vets* supplies guitars and guitar instruction to veterans in VA facilities. What began on the Spinal Cord Unit at the Milwaukee VA has expanded to veterans at the Tomah VA Medical Center.

"It is so rewarding to see fellow veterans just light up at the new-found ability to make music," said Dan Van Buskirk, President of *Guitars for Vets*.

*Guitars for Vets* can be reached through their web site at [www.guitarsforvets.org](http://www.guitarsforvets.org).



*Guitars for Vets* member, John Linder, right, shows an attentive veteran a trick on the guitar during a group lesson after a guitar distribution.

## Spectacular

Called "spectacular" by a local newspaper, the new Tomah VA float made its debut at the Syttende Mai (the Norwegian Constitution Day) parade, in Westby, WI, on May 18, with a variety of other bookings planned this .

The float was designed and built by a member of the Elks Lodge #665 of Marshfield, Wisconsin. The unit is "all-inclusive," with a built in stereo system, lighting, storage tubes for the flag collection, etc.



Jerry Molnar, Tomah VA acting medical center Director (left) stands with Myron Keding, creator of the facility's new float.

## National Employee Health & Fitness Day

Tomah VA celebrated National Employee Health & Fitness Day with a Fun walk/run on May 21st, organized by students participating in the VA's Leadership Development Program. Fitness handouts were available and a Tai Chi demonstration was provided. Participants also received a turkey wrap made by the Canteen and a bottle of water. A fitness crossword puzzle was available for employees not able to walk/run. For more information about the National Association for Health & Fitness, National Employee Health & Fitness Day or the State Councils, visit [www.physicalfitness.org](http://www.physicalfitness.org).

## Network Awards and Recognition

### Congratulations to the Milwaukee “Fellows”

Medical Center Director Robert H. Beller and Associate Chief of Staff for Clinical Affairs Jerome Van Ruiswyk, MD, have become “Fellows” in the American College of Healthcare Executives, a national professional society for health care leaders.

Fellow status represents achievement of the highest standard of professional development. To obtain fellow status, candidates must fulfill multiple requirements, including passing a comprehensive examination, meeting academic and experiential criteria, earning continuing education credits and demonstrating professional/community involvement. Fellows are also committed to ongoing professional development and undergo recertification every three years.

### Madison VA Hospital Director Honored



From left-Michael J. Kussman, M.D., Under Secretary for Health, Deborah Thompson, William Feeley, Deputy Under Secretary for Operations and Management, and Secretary James B. Peake.

Deborah Thompson, Director, Madison VA, received the *American College of Healthcare Executives, Senior-Level HealthCare Executive, Regent’s Award* presented by Secretary Peake at the VA Symposium held in

Chicago, March 13, 2008. The VISN 12 Network is proud of the work that Ms. Thompson has done to promote advancements in healthcare in the VA.

### Iron Mountain VAMC Makes Progress Toward Environmental Performance Goals

***You can’t have a sick environment and healthy people.***



Iron Mountain Veterans Affairs Medical Center received the *Practice Greenhealth’s 2008 Partner Recognition Award* for making significant progress toward environmental performance goals. Greg Haslow, Industrial Hygienist, received the award for the medical center.

You can’t have a sick environment and healthy people, so in theory, health-care and the environment would appear to be joined at the hip. That would explain why we are seeing an explosion of green health care facilities, committed to protecting patient health, as well as the health of the environment. The two are inextricably linked. Iron Mountain Veterans Affairs Medical Center (IMVAMC) is a good example. They are helping create a healthier environment – for patients, staff and their community, and for their role in pollution prevention efforts, they received a Partner Recognition Award at the Practice Greenhealth Environmental Excellence Awards in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on May 20, 2008.

“Improving environmental performance is not a responsibility limited to the health-care sector,” said Greg Haslow, “If we want a sustainable future, everyone needs to become involved. Practice Greenhealth created the vision for our industry, for Iron Mountain Veterans Affairs Medical Center, this is just the start of a lifelong commitment.”

The Practice Greenhealth Environmental Excellence Awards celebrate the achievements and commitment of

health care's environmental champions. The awards give special recognition to facilities whose efforts are aimed at eliminating mercury, preventing pollution and minimizing waste. This year's awards were held in conjunction with CleanMed 2008, a global conference for environmental leaders in health-care.

### VA Chaplain Receives National VA Award

The Secretary's Award for Excellence in Chaplaincy has been received by Chaplain Juliana Leshar of the VAH Madison. This is the highest award that can be bestowed upon a VA Chaplain. Chaplain Leshar received the award in the category of "Contract/Intermittent/Fee Basis Chaplain." Selected by a panel of independent reviewers, Chaplain Leshar was selected from a number of excellent nominees in this category.



Approximately 700 VA employees attended the celebration.

Congratulations to Kim Wasilewski, Assistant Chief of Canteen at North Chicago VAMC who prepared and presented the food. Photo's of Ms. Wasilewski's finished masterpiece's are shown.



### Wisconsin Chapter of HFMA Awards Highest Honor



Tim Longden places Founders Medal of Honor Award on his office wall.

### First Annual Veterans Canteen Service Culinary Awards



Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) at North Chicago VAMC won the "Golden Fork Award" in recognition of excellence in VCS Culinary Arts.

This award is intended to spotlight outstanding talents of VCS food service in the areas of creative catering, food special events and excellence in daily food service including, appearance, taste, variety, and quality.

The award submission came from North Chicago's all employee holiday celebration held this past December.

The Healthcare Financial Management Association has rewarded Milwaukee VA Compliance Officer A. Timothy Longden, HFMA, CMPE, with the Founders Medal of Honor Award at the Wisconsin chapter's annual meeting held recently at Lake Geneva. The award is conferred by nomination of the chapter board of directors and is awarded for significant service by the Wisconsin Chapter of the Healthcare Financial Management Association.

This prestigious individual award recognizes an individual who has been actively involved in HFMA for at

least three years after earning the Muncie Gold Award and provided significant service at the chapter, regional and at the national level in at least two of those years. Mr. Longden served on the national board of examiners providing input for the first Financial Management of Physician Practices certification exam. He has been compliance officer at Milwaukee for eight years.

## Thinking Green



Front row from left, Mary Jo Vitton, Rebecca Shimanek and Don Lee captured first place honors for their entry, "Eagle" Symbol of America's Freedom, in the recycling sculpture contest during Earth Day activities at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Iron Mountain. They are shown with Michael J. Murphy, back left, medical center Director, and Greg Haslow, GEMS Program Coordinator.

The Iron Mountain Veterans Administration Medical Center's GEMS Committee hosted the second annual awareness fair celebrating the 38<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day and the 136<sup>th</sup> observation of Arbor Day. The Green Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) Committee displayed booths and had contests for the visitors on recycling issues. The Iron Mountain High School Environmental Club participated by displaying some of the posters they had developed. Through the cooperation of the Dickinson Conservation District more than 420 seedlings were passed out to participants at the fair. This year's fair focused on Global Warming and how planting a tree can help combat it.

## National Volunteer Week

Observance of National Volunteer Week April 20 – April 26<sup>th</sup> occurred at hospitals and organizations across the country. A number of VISN 12 facilities participated in many planned events to recognize the contributions of these very important people.

## Hines Volunteer Named Winner of DAV Scholarship

Congratulations to Hines Volunteer **Bridget O'Sullivan**, who was recently named a winner of the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship.

Bridget, the daughter of Hines employee **Mary O'Sullivan**, has logged over 1000 hours of volunteering at Hines during her breaks from school. Helping people is her passion and she has decided to become a nurse.

"The entire cardiology team at Hines has helped me develop a great appreciation for what the physicians, nurses, secretaries, managers and entire staff bring to their job," Bridget wrote in her essay. "When I become a nurse, I hope to experience a working environment similar to the one I have been volunteering in. The Cardiology Department has an extremely high standard of healthcare and dedication to their jobs."



In memory of the late Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown, the Disabled American Veterans have established the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program. It recognizes outstanding young volunteers who give of their time by awarding annual scholarships that may be used to continue their education.

## Volunteers Honored for a Half Century of Service

Volunteers Akira and Mary Toki pictured with hospital director, Deborah Thompson, were recently honored for providing more than 50 years of dedicated service to the patients at the VAH Madison. Akira served as a volunteer tour guide at the grand opening of the hospital in September 1951. Mary began her volunteering at the facility in 1957. Both have remained active VA volunteers since they began. A special thanks was extended to them both on this momentous occasion.



VA volunteers were honored at the **North Chicago VAMC** on April 24<sup>th</sup> at the Country Squire Restaurant in Grayslake. Over three hundred volunteers, guests and staff were in attendance at the 2008 Annual Volunteer Awards Program. The program featured the talents and voice of Dawn Crowther, who entertained the audience with songs from the swing era and songs that she had written herself.

Volunteers were honored with awards for their many hours of devotion and dedication to our veterans.

Top honors went to Ms. Jean Keehn, of Libertyville, who received a 17,500 hour outstanding service plate (photo right). Other prestigious VAVS awards followed with Michael Hiley, of Zion receiving a 10,000 hour outstanding service bowl; Steve Kolas, of Salem WI, received a 7,500 hour plaque; Emma Corcoran, of Zion, and Elizabeth Korbai, of Waukegan, both receiving a 6,500 hour appreciation awards. Ramon Calderon, of Waukegan, Robert Dever, of North Chicago, Robert



Sittler, of Waukegan and Jim Duddy, of Spring Grove all received 5,000 hour awards. Also, a 4,000 hour Presidential Award from President Bush's initiative encouraging all Americans to serve volunteer hours to community and country was presented to Ramon Calderon and Robert Dever. Other volunteer awards ranged from 3,750 hours to 50 hours.

The **Tomah VA** recognized the annual observance with a breakfast catered by the VA Canteen one day and a banquet and awards ceremony was held two days later.

Volunteer recognition comes in many forms, certificates of appreciation, service pins, and accolades from service organizations. But, nothing can beat a heart-felt "Thank You" from the people with whom volunteers work. Nancy



volunteers between 10 - 12 hours each week, sorting and mailing the stack of bills produced in PFS.

*Pictured is the entire staff from Patient Financial Services (PFS) department who visited volunteer Nancy Adams (seated) and delivered a beautiful bouquet of flowers.*

The National theme "Volunteers Inspire By Example" couldn't be truer of our VA volunteers. Congratulations and a special thank you to each and every volunteer for your service to our nation's veterans.

## VA “Welcomes Home” OEF/OIF Veterans

Welcome Home events are happening across VISN 12, receiving veterans from the current conflict in Iraq with a host of information, benefits, hospitality and gratitude.

A Welcome Home Celebration co-sponsored by **Hines VAH** and **Jesse Brown VAMC** held on May 30<sup>th</sup> at the University of Illinois at Chicago Forum, was a huge success. With an attendance of approximately 350 people, including a total of 180 veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, event coordinators were pleased with the outcome.

Almost 60 community, government and service organizations provided information on employment, veterans benefits, health care and other community resources to assist veterans in their transition to home and family. An emphasis was placed on inviting Chicago-area employers who were looking to hire OEF/OIF veterans and at least five veterans were offered jobs on the spot.

The event featured food, entertainment, give-away items and a large variety of raffle prizes, including professional sports tickets donated by the Chicago White Sox, Chicago Rush and Chicago Fire. Other prizes distributed included Chicago Cubs’ hats, service-specific pocket watches, model kits donated by Help Hospitalized Veterans and gift certificates from Target and Best Buy.



*OIF veteran and Hines employee Mary Reed (center) won four tickets to a White Sox game at the event. She is pictured with Valerie Creedon, JB OEF/OIF Program Manager (left) and Ivy Lloyd, Hines OEF/OIF Program Manager.*

Veterans who brought families with them were able to leave their children at the Kids Corner, which offered a variety of games and activities, including face-painting and entertainment by Ronald McDonald and two other



clowns (Barbara Hunt, VIST Coordinator, Hines VA Hospital, pictured on the right, and her husband Jim).

Also popular were the complimentary massages provided

by the Illinois School of Massage Therapy and the relaxation exercises offered by Healing Touch.

VA nurses screened veterans for blood pressure and blood sugar levels while Jesse Brown’s Dental Service provided complimentary toothbrushes and information on oral hygiene. A number of the veterans enrolled with VA

at the site, including several who said they had never considered going to a VA hospital until coming to the Welcome Home Celebration and seeing all the services VA offered.



On Saturday, May 17, the **North Chicago VAMC** and the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes held a Welcome Home Celebration with several VA and Navy employees who volunteered to help support the event. Rear Admiral Jon W. Bayless, Jr., Commander, Navy Region Midwest attended and spoke to the active duty military and veterans who serve in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and thanked them for their service to this country. Approximately 100 OEF/OIF active duty military and veterans attended the event.



*Iraqi Veteran Glen Roeck from Gurnee, IL takes time out with his wife Catina, their two children Jonathan and Emily and Catina's father, John Samples, Police Chief at North Chicago VA Medical Center.*

North Chicago's event included informational booths on veteran health benefits and services, as pictured right, staff from the North Chicago VA Medical Center talk with OEF/OIF veterans about benefits and services they are entitled to.



Live entertainment by the Navy Horizon Band provided some entertainment while several local businesses donated merchandise and/or their services including the Gurnee restaurant who assisted in coordinating the event and the Outback Steak House, who provided food, as pictured below, serving National Guardsmen from Fort Sheridan.



Jockey International in Kenosha, WI donated T-shirts while Ultimate Screening, Mundelein, IL, printed a 'Welcome Home' logo on the shirts. Employees from Starbucks in Gurnee Mills served coffee and 95 WIIL Rock Radio Station in Kenosha, WI, was on the air live to help promote the event.

The Lakefront was the site of the Welcome Home event for the **Milwaukee VAMC** returning veterans. Blue skies, a brisk wind and knowledgeable staff from the medical center, Regional Office and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs greeted all who took the time from their weekend to venture to the Lakefront. The celebration was held in conjunction with military displays as part of Milwaukee Armed Forces Week. Music by Joe Cantifio and Guitars for Vets entertained the adults. The hit of the show for the kids was Will's Fun House, featuring who else but Sponge Bob.



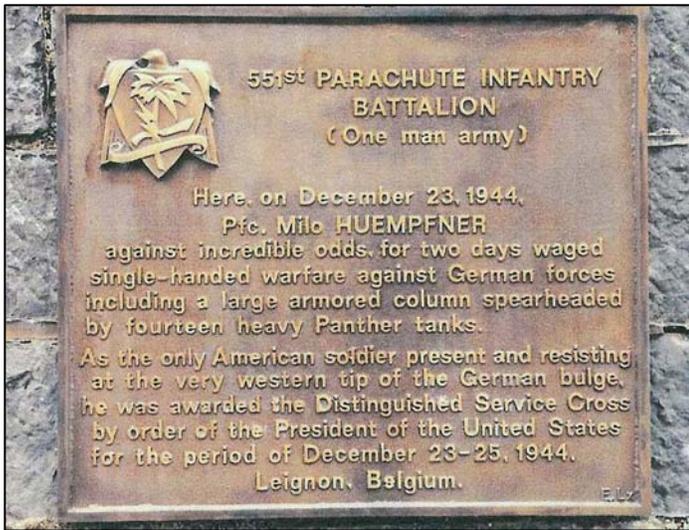
Plans are underway for Welcome Home events at all other VISN 12 facilities throughout the remainder of the year.

VISN 12 wants to assist our newest OEF/OIF veterans in their transition home in any way possible.

## Green Bay Clinic Renamed; *A Monument To Heroism*

You have probably never heard of Milo C. Huempfner but in Leignon, Belgium, many have. Pfc. Huempfner was affectionately remembered in his hometown of Green Bay, Wisconsin as the Green Bay VA Clinic was recently renamed the Milo C. Huempfner Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic.

“This Clinic will forever be a monument to both his actions and his deeds in time of peace and in time of wars,” said Milwaukee medical center Director Robert H. Beller at the ceremony that attracted family members as well as members of the community. The event was held outdoors as members of Huempfner family and politicians recounted Pfc. Huempfner bravery and his community involvement.



Milo C. Huempfner earned the reputation of ‘One Man Army’ for his attacks against an armored Nazi column during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. Separated from his unit, Pfc. Huempfner hid in the village of Leignon, Belgium and waged a one-man guerrilla war behind enemy lines, destroying armored vehicles, Nazi machine gun and artillery emplacements and warning Allied units of impending ambushes.

On Christmas Eve of 1944, he stood guard in the freezing darkness outside the town’s church while the villagers celebrated midnight Mass. His bravery and heroism earned him the Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor, as well as the Bronze star and other commendations.

After his discharge from the Army, Huempfner continued his service by attending the funerals of over 900 veterans in full dress uniform, and did so until a week before this death in 1985.



Congressman Steve Kagen, M.D., introduced legislation to honor the Green Bay resident. It passed the House on October 23, passed the Senate on December 13 and was signed by President George W. Bush on December 21, 2007 as Public Law 110-145. Former Representative Mark Green, current Ambassador to Tanzania, sponsored the legislation during a previous session of Congress but it was not considered.

The Clinic provides service to 3,500 veterans and offers primary care and mental health services. It is staffed with three primary care physicians and seventeen support staff as well as a psychologist and two support staff and home based primary care staff of five. The Milo C. Huempfner Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic is one of four satellite clinics operated by Milwaukee’s VA Medical Center.



## National Nurses Week Across VISN 12

National Nurses Week, May 6-12<sup>th</sup>, was celebrated in a variety of ways at VISN 12 facilities, recognizing the contributions VA Nurses make in their quest to care for our nation's heroes in need.

Nurses Week at the **Milwaukee VA Medical Center** was in part a trip down memory lane. Nurses on unit 4-C donned their white uniforms and caps for a day and it was more than show. It was a part of the American Organization of Nurse Executive Research Project: *Disseminating Transforming Care at the Beside*. Julie K. Shinn, RN, MSN, program manager for medicine-oncology at the medical center, said that 4-C is one of several pilot units across the country studying patient safety and how to get nurses back to the bedside. Included in the project is nurse identification and professional image. Mrs. Shinn explained, "Patients want to know who is their nurse. In healthcare today, everyone dresses similarly. Nobody knows who is who." This is a work in progress as the project is a two year trial.



National Nurses Week at the **Tomah VA** is a time to honor and thank the 169 professional nurses (Nurse Practitioners, RNs, LPNs) who provide comprehensive, quality nursing care and support around the clock to our veterans. The week was kicked off by a 'traveling tea' delivered to the night shift nursing staff; the evening shift was honored in a similar fashion later in the week. All medical center employees were invited to honor their nurses at the Nurses Tea on May 9<sup>th</sup>. The event

included remarks from acting medical center Director Jerry Molnar and Nurse Executive Tresh Ten Haaf, music, a candle-lighting ceremony and a "blessing of the hands." The Nurses' Social featured a motivational message by Carl Bargabos, RN, MSN, associate professor at Viterbo University College of Nursing, followed by a time of socializing and networking with nursing peers. A poster display showcasing nursing activities was open during the week, featuring nursing's mission, vision and values, a comparison of nursing at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and a discussion of excellence. All staff were invited to view these interactive posters.



Four members of the nursing staff at the **Iron Mountain VAMC** were honored with Excellence in Nursing Awards. Photo below, from left, Nicole Heikkinen, a NA, assigned to the nursing home care unit, cited for her role as an advocate in the restorative program; Judy Sexton, LPN, cited for her effectiveness in improving and delivering patient care to veterans; Sarah Buckley, RN, currently the coordinator of the home-based primary care program; Karen Swiss, RN, joined the VA staff in July 2006, cited as a professional and knowledgeable nurse, who treats patients and others with compassion and respect. In presenting the awards, Michael J Murphy, noted "These nurses are outstanding members of our health care team and demonstrate the skill and compassion that makes VA health care among the best in America. We're proud of them and we are glad they are on the Iron Mountain staff."



**Tomah VAMC** and **Madison VAH** nursing departments collaborated to provide a “Nurse Exchange” day in which nurses from each facility had the opportunity to shadow one another. This was a great chance to meet and work with nursing colleagues in the VISN. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs Excellence in Nursing Awards were announced, Jim Stading, LPN; Miriam McIntyre, RN (Staff Nurse role); Mary Vieth, RN (Expanded Nurse role).

The National Nurses Week celebration at **North Chicago VAMC** marked a change for the future. Nursing staff took advantage of the opportunity to write about the many ways that their professional work has impacted the lives of our veterans. Where nursing is frequently referred to as an occupation of caring, NCVAMC nurses wrote about how they nurture their patient-heroes through the use of attentiveness to their needs, and a tender touch with a caring smile. The event was celebrated by the distribution of ice cream bars wrapped in nursing trivia questions, bookmarks proclaiming administration’s appreciation and a reception for all nursing staff as the backdrop to recognizing nursing staff that were nominated by their peers as those who practice excellence in nursing.

The annual Excellence in Nursing Awards recognized two Registered Nurses—one in a staff nurse role and one in an expanded nurse role, and a Nursing Assistant. The following awards were presented; Pamela Thomson, RN, MS (expanded role); Eun Yang, RN and Lucinda Brown, NA; William Armstead, NA was recognized for his nomination for the Nursing Assistant award. At the reception, Mary Ann Cardinali, Associate Director of Patient/Nursing Services further commemorated the nursing staff skills, cooperative teamwork, and outstanding nursing outcomes with the announcements that the NCVAMC is beginning its Magnet journey. The Magnet Recognition Program, developed by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) recognizes health care organizations that provide nursing excellence. While there will be many changes on their Magnet journey, the NCVAMC nurses’ commitment to providing quality care will remain.

Rosie Elder, Nurse Manager and Mary Ann Cardinali, Associate Director for Patient Nursing Services, (pictured right) speak to nursing staff during a program at the North Chicago VA Medical Center to recognize National Nurses Week.



**Hines VAH** honored Nurses with several programs and events during Nurses Week. Congratulations to the following winners of the Hines Nursing Excellence Awards: Rochelle Brewer, Secretary’s Award for Excellence in Nursing-LPN/Medicine Subspecialty Clinics; Alan Filkas, RN, BSN, Venous Access Team/Secretary’s Award for Excellence in Nursing—RN/Staff Nurse; Edgar Pickens HCT, Secretary’s Award for Excellence-HCT/Restorative Nursing; Mary Theresa Lau, MS, RN, Secretary’s Award for Excellence in Nursing-RN/Expanded Role/ Nutritional Support; Mary Theresa Lau was also the VISN 12 winner in her category.

Magnet Status was also a focus during Nurse’s week celebrations at **Madison VAH** with a poster presentation (picture right) while also hosting a food drive for a local area food bank that supports the Vet Center.



The theme was “14 Forces of the Magnet Recognition Program.” To vote on displays, attendees from all over the hospital donated food items for the food drive. It was a successful and educational event.

## Memorial Day

Memorial Day, formerly known as 'Decoration Day,' commemorates U.S. men and women who perished while in military service to their country. Along with many, VISN 12 facilities observed this holiday, remembering those who have fallen, the men and women who served their country.

The **Tomah VAMC's** annual Memorial Day program was held on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The program included a guest speaker from nearby Volk Field (Air National Guard



installation), music from the high school band, poetry reading by a Vietnam veteran, and the annual

"Tribute to the Fallen." Jean Villhauer, (photo above) rings a bell as Susan Peters and Bob Karpinsky read the names of Wisconsin's service men and women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan during the Tomah VA's tribute.

**Jesse Brown VAMC** participated in the annual Chicago Memorial Day Parade, the largest in the nation. The medical center contingent included a float with a sound system that enabled members of the Jesse Brown Patient Chorus to sing to spectators lining the streets. Members of the Veterans Strike Force led the unit.



Over 1,000 attended Memorial Day ceremonies at the Wood National Cemetery in Milwaukee, WI. Part of the ceremonies included the laying of wreaths, as shown below.



**Milwaukee VAMC** employee Laura Rinaldi (photo below) read a passage on the history of Memorial Day from a book written by a former resident of the medical center.



An ecumenical prayer service at the medical center chapel took place, honoring all veterans who have died and/or were buried at the Wood National Cemetery in the past year.

The VA is responsible for serving the needs of veterans including providing burial in a national cemetery. VISN 12 facilities continue to honor and serve and acknowledge the sacrifices made by those who perished and served their country.

## Kids and the VA

### Civil War School Day Cont. from cover page



*Artillery demonstration, one of the many stations at this year's Civil War School Day Event*

At the field hospital, Civil War surgeons set the record straight on field medical practices. Even a few brave souls “played dead” for the undertaker while students learned about the advances in care for the deceased as the Civil War progressed. Stations also included the regimental laundress, blacksmith, Civil War nurses and civilians discussing 19th-century dress, customs and children’s games. After touring the stations for about three hours, President Abraham Lincoln delivered a closing address, mustering the new veterans out of service and sending them back to school with their discharge papers in hand.

Next year Reclaiming Our Heritage will be held on May 30-31. It is a living history for everyone in the family. The event is hosted by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and sponsored by the Soldiers Home Foundation, Inc.

### National Veterans History Project at North Chicago

Thirty-four students from New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, came to the **North Chicago VAMC** to visit with eighteen veterans to make them a permanent part of history.

Social Studies class at New Trier decided to participate in the National Veterans History Project in which the

students interview veterans and videotape them as they tell of their experiences while they were in the military serving our country. These veterans served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraq. The purpose of this project is to record and preserve these priceless stories for future generations, so that they may better understand the sacrifices that were made by these brave men and women. The students were amazed listening to these stories, which in some cases were not easy for the veterans to share. You could tell that after each group finished there was an unspoken bond between the students and each veteran they interviewed.



Now the students will send the videotapes and written information to the Library of Congress to be preserved forever as part of our nation’s history. We thank our veterans for sharing their stories and helping to teach the youth of today that freedom is not free.

### 2008 Take Your Child to Work Day

The **VAH Madison** hosted Take Your Child to Work Day. The theme was “Making Choices for a Better World.” The program opened with Deborah A. Thompson, Director, welcoming approximately 75 youth in attendance.

Engaged in numerous ways throughout the day, participants gained a host of information including a computer and internet safety presentation provided by Jerry Kirchner, Information Security Officer, tours through various areas of the hospital, a safety demonstration provided by VA Police officers, and

participation in a tornado drill. Pizza, soda, fruit and ice cream was the fare for the day's event sponsored by the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee and Federal Women's Program.



VA Police officers presented a safety demonstration to a captive audience during the Madison VAH "Take Your Child to Work Day" event.

The Tomah VA observed "Take our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" on April 24th, where 45 children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews of employees participated in the program sponsored by the Federal Women's Program Committee. The program included medical center tours and a pizza party.

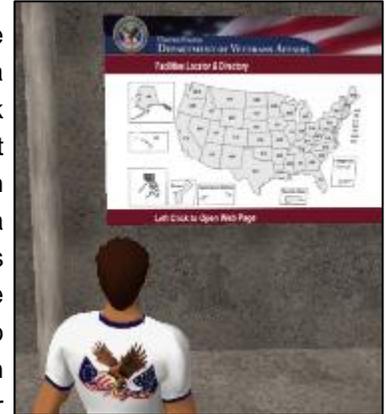


James Roseborough, VISN 12 Network Director, greeted the children at the Tomah VA during his recent visit to Tomah.

## VHA Has Entered Second Life

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has entered Second Life, the 3-D, online virtual world to provide veterans with another means of accessing important health and benefits information. VHA has leased a virtual three-story,

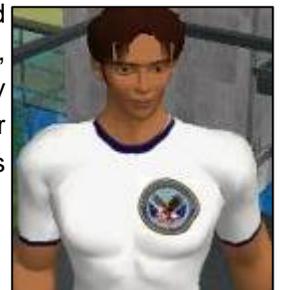
contemporary office building in a professional office park as part of a pilot project to extend their outreach efforts. The office has a number of features designed to invite visitors back to information available on the VA Internet. For



example, a large poster on the wall shows a map of the United States. The avatar can click on the map, and the browser will open to the [VA Facilities Locator and Directory](#).

The office also provides many of the features found in a real-world office, such as a desk, a lounge on the second floor, and a conference area with a projector and screen on the third floor. When the avatars need a break from the daily grind, they can step out onto the balcony and look around the park.

To visit, you will need to join Second Life by creating an account and setting up your avatar (a basic account is free). You can find information on all of this at the [Second Life](#)\* web site <http://secondlife.com> . Once you have your avatar, you will need to download and install the Second Life software. Again, you can find information on how to install the software, system requirements, and network issues on the Second Life web site. When you do visit, you can show your VA pride by picking up a free t-shirt for your avatar to wear "inworld," as shown at right.



## New Hospital Report Card



A new “hospital report card” by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) gives the Department’s health care system high marks, with VA facilities often outscoring private-sector health plans in standards commonly accepted by the health care industry.

“This report is a comprehensive snapshot of the quality of care VA provides to our veterans,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “From waiting times and staffing levels to hospital accreditation and patient satisfaction, this report demonstrates VA is providing high quality care to the veterans we serve.”

Among the report’s findings:

- 98 percent of veterans were seen within 30 days at primary care facilities, 97 percent at specialty clinics. (Veterans requiring emergency care are seen immediately)
- All of VA’s 153 medical centers are accredited by the independent Joint Commission which accredits all U.S. health care facilities.
- The quality scores for older veterans are similar to those for younger veterans.

Although screening for breast and cervical cancer for women in VA facilities exceeds screening in private-sector facilities, women veterans lag behind their male counterparts in some quality measurements, the report noted.

VA has already launched an aggressive program to ensure women veterans receive the highest quality of care, including placement of women advocates in every outpatient clinic and medical center. Health care was a major topic at VA’s National Summit on Women Veterans Issues held on June 20-22 in Washington.

The report also found minority veterans are generally less satisfied with inpatient and outpatient care than white veterans. That disparity will be the focus of an in-

depth study, based upon input from veterans, which will be completed this summer.

“Disparities in treatment and satisfaction based on gender or ethnic background are unacceptable,” Peake said. “VA has a robust program to look at disparities and to deal with the underlying causes.”

The report card is available on the Internet at:

[http://www.va.gov/health/docs/Hospital\\_Quality\\_Report.pdf](http://www.va.gov/health/docs/Hospital_Quality_Report.pdf).

In February, Congress directed VA to complete the report card, highlighting measurements of quality, safety, timeliness, efficiency and “patient-centeredness.”

“This report demonstrates VA’s determination to be open and accountable for the quality and safety of the care we provide,” Peake said. “No other health care organization provides this much information about its ability to care for its patients.”

## Integrated Ethics

### *Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care*

As Veterans Health Administration (VHA) strives to continue to deliver the highest quality patient care, it is critical to continually assess employees’ perceptions of their work environment. In just a matter of a few weeks, every employee will be asked to complete the first Integrated Ethics staff survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect information on your perceptions of ethics in your work place. This survey is part of an ongoing effort to improve ethical practices throughout VHA.

The survey will be conducted every other year. This Year’s survey will occur from August 4 through September 5, 2008. Yes, the survey is voluntary, but we would like 100% participation in VISN 12. The survey will take less than 30 minutes to complete and can be taken on line or by telephone. The surveys will go directly to an outside vendor, Sirota Consulting Corporation, for tabulation. All information you provide will be treated confidentially and cannot be linked to any individual.

## Sending an E-mail? Think First

### 1. Government Computers are for Official Business

VA Directive 6001, 'Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment Including Information Technology' dated July 28, 2000, defines acceptable limited conditions for VA employees' personal use of Government computers. Proper use of Government computers is also covered in the mandatory Cyber Security Awareness training that you, as a VA employee, are required to take every year.

**2. Patient communication.** E-mail should NOT be used to communicate with patients.

**3. E-mail is not private.** Messages get stored in places you would never expect. Expect what you write to be public knowledge. Think twice before sending and decide if the e-mail is worth risking your job, credibility, and professionalism.

**4. Don't Forward Hoaxes, Jokes, Spam or Chain Letters.** E-mail does not have the subtleties of spoken or face-to-face conversation, and it is remarkably easy to be misunderstood or offend someone.

Remember, e-mail is forever and it can be damaging or downright embarrassing.

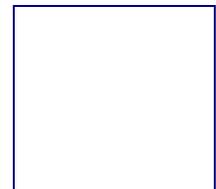
### 5. Take a Second look Before you send a message.

Reread and reconsider the entire message before you send it. Try to read the e-mail from the recipient's perspective. Be very careful how you express yourself, especially if you feel heated about the subject. E-mail lacks cues and clues that convey the sense in which what you say is to be taken, and you can easily convey the wrong impression. Also, apply the "Front Page Test" before sending the message-would you be comfortable seeing your e-mail on the front page of the newspaper?

**6. Do not 'Reply to All.'** Reply only to those who need it. If the message was sent to a large group, stop and think before sending a response – does the entire group really need to see it? Send to a single recipient whenever possible.

**7. Confidentiality.** Employees should always take necessary steps to ensure confidentiality is maintained when transmitting sensitive and or private information by appropriately encrypting messages as appropriate.

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