



## VA Employee Pioneers New Mental Health Program in Wisconsin Army National Guard

After he graduated from high school in 1979, Mike Brandt visited an Army recruiter. When his dad, a World War II Army veteran, found out, he was not happy and asked his son not to enlist. "He was scared and worried about my entering service," Brandt reflects. "I abided by his wishes and got on with my life. But it was always in the back of my mind, 'serve, serve, serve.'"

Brandt became a psychologist and opened a behavioral medicine practice in Milwaukee. Yet, the calling to serve did not cease, in fact, Brandt says "it became louder." In 2004, he left his multi-site hospital-based practice and came to work at the Tomah VA, where he's served first as a staff psychologist and then as Mental Health Service Line Manager. Although he loves his work at the VA, is greatly inspired by the veterans, and feels it is rewarding, he said, "I always knew I would find a way to serve in uniform."



And so, in September 2007, Brandt once again connected with an Army recruiter, and later, he attended an Army Medical conference for the Wisconsin National Guard, where he met Kenneth Lee, MD, a colonel in the Guard and also division manager of a VA spinal cord injury unit at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

"Attending that conference and talking with Dr. Lee inspired me even more." Brandt remembers, "I signed up shortly thereafter." **And, on September 12, pinned by Col. Lee, Dr. Michael Brandt became CPT Michael Brandt, Wisconsin Army National Guard.**

### Inside This Issue

2	Warriors Reunited by Tomah VA Employee
4	Network News
13	CARES Update
14	Network Awards and Recognition
20	Wheelchair Games
23	Valet Parking Initiative

Capt. Brandt will have a unique mission in the Guard. **His work will be to create a mental health program for the Guard, something that Wisconsin currently does not have for its soldiers.** Brandt's goal is to work with soldiers who are suffering from mental health issues but emphasize working with them *before* they have a mental health crisis as well; building resiliency in their mental health by focusing on emotional strengths that they already possess. "Historically, mental health has never been a primary focus of health care. However, we have now entered into what I feel is a 'special age' for mental health in which a tremendous emphasis is being placed on the individuals' emotional lives.

### ***New Mental Health Program (Cont.)***

There is a newfound power; a mental health revolution is underway." Brandt said. "I feel it's important to build on mental health skills of people who are already doing okay in order to prevent a crisis. Instead of waiting for someone to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, help them build their resiliency toward it now."

"Psychology, psychiatry, the field of mental health has been in existence for over a century yet the principles have not been systematically applied to war-time service members." Brandt reflected, "I look forward to developing and strengthening what the soldiers already do well, building a momentum that will help them deal with eventual barriers/stress. This approach is a real change from mental health since its previous focus was much less preventative and much more of a crisis-oriented approach."

Brandt also pointed out that in the VA, he sees veterans who have been discharged and that many of them have waited a "good long time" before they dealt with their mental health issues. He looks forward to setting up a program that works in the Guard to increase awareness and reduce the stigma often associated with mental illness and thereby reduce the barriers to soldiers seeking help early on.

When asked why he, at age 47, would want to uproot his life and potentially be deployed overseas, one of the main reasons Brandt gives is this: "The need for mental health professionals has never been greater than for today's soldier. I want to serve my country by improving mental health in service members." He hopes other mental health professionals will follow suit.

"I would say that joining the military at my age is extremely rare," Brandt admitted. "In fact, they had to waive the age requirement so that I could enlist. But I don't know why more don't do it: people my age are at the peak of their professional development and have so much experience they could share. And, people in their fourth and fifth decades of life tend to want to give back to their community – this is one way to do that."

"I look forward to helping soldiers with their mental health issues while applying the leadership skills I've learned in VA."

Brandt expects that he will eventually be deployed. If so, he'd leave his wife and three children (aged 17, 13, and 6). He claims they are all "on board" with his decision to enlist. "They were scared at first. But, after some discussions, they were educated that while war is part of the Guard, members of the National Guard also help in more local crises such as floods etc. which my family could relate to."

"I have a deep sense of duty," Brandt concluded. "It is a privilege to be a citizen of the United States of America. I am filled with gratitude every day for living under the skies of freedom and democracy. It is and will be an honor and a privilege in this time of my life to be able to serve my country and my State."

### **Warriors Reunited by Tomah VA Employee**

When Tom Teeples, a mail clerk at the Tomah VA, decided to be a hospice volunteer, he never expected to touch lives in the way he has.

"It was shortly after 4:00 p.m. when I reported to the Palliative Care/ Hospice Coordinator," Teeples remembers of this afternoon

in March 2008. "This was to be my first assignment as a hospice volunteer. I was, as you would expect, anxious." Teeples' nerves were quickly calmed by the pleasant welcome from Maureen Juracich, coordinator of the hospice program.

"She is just the type of person you would expect to find here. If I had to use one word to describe her, it would be 'compassion.' It spilled out of her," says Teeples. He found the same characteristic in Jolene Renda, a VA



Nurse Practitioner who sparked Teeples' interest in becoming a hospice volunteer. According to Teeples, "these two professionals, in my humble opinion, are the best at what they do."

Teeples was introduced to some of the staff working on the floor that afternoon, and was oriented to the hospice unit. Then Teeples met his first hospice patient, Mr. Marvin Radke.

Mr. Radke had just finished dinner. The two men made some small talk about this and that and then Mr. Radke wanted to show Teeples the decorated cane he had made for Tomah VA's local Creative Arts Festival competition. According to Teeples, the cane was something on which he had obviously worked many hours. As he went to put it away, Teeples noticed a certificate hanging on the wall. "I looked closely at it, and saw that it had been given to Marvin from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division," remembers Teeples. "I told Marvin that my father was with the 32<sup>nd</sup> during World War II. Marvin said that he fought in the South Pacific and began to name some islands where he had been. The names of the islands were familiar to me, I had heard of them before. They were the same islands my dad had been on during the war. It was at this point my questions and excitement picked up the pace. And not only did I find out that Marvin was in the same Division, he was in the same Company. I told him my name again; he listened and looked at me. 'Your dad is Bob?' he said in an almost whisper. 'Yes,' I replied."



"The rest of our visit was a flurry of names, battles and jeep rides. I could hardly wait to let my dad in on all of this. As soon as I left Marvin, I got to a phone and called

my dad. He was dumbfounded to say the least, and arranged to come down the very next day to visit Marvin. They did, and it made them both very happy to see one another. I watched them together pushing their walkers down the hall. A little different than patrolling the jungles of New Guinea. But none the less, two old soldiers were on the march again."

Mr. Radke passed away in July. His family was grateful for the time Teeples spent with him those last several months. Teeples continues to serve other hospice patients, stopping in the unit every day after work. He relates well with the veterans and has an excellent working relationship with the staff. In his first six months of volunteering, he has served 147 hours. But that's not why he volunteers.

"I simply want to help veterans," Teeples explains. "I try to help the hospice patients anyway I can. Much of the time spent is just listening to that they have to say. I like volunteering because it gives me the chance to not only meet interesting veterans who have served our country with honor, but also to get to know and work closely with the caregivers now serving those veterans."

Teeples is a veteran himself, serving in Vietnam with the 75<sup>th</sup> Rangers. He later joined the Wisconsin Army National Guard where he served as a flight medic. He retired in 1999 with 22 years of military service. He is also the grandson of a VA "Grey Lady" volunteer who served many hours serving veterans; he himself is active in many veterans' service organizations.

Teeples is full of surprises. Jolene Renda was sitting with Tom at lunch one day as he was sketching. Renda remembers, "He sketched a beautiful scene of the countryside and an old barn. I asked him if we could use it for bereavement follow up cards that we use for the veterans' family. He of course agreed, and we have been using these sketches for the past few years." Tom Teeples truly exemplifies the adage, "Veterans Serving Veterans."

## Network News

### Hines

#### Purple Heart Cruise Fun

Forty veterans from Hines had the exciting opportunity to attend the Kup's Purple Heart Cruise which took place on Thursday, July 31st, aboard the Odyssey cruise ship downtown Chicago. The veterans were treated to a four hour cruise on Lake Michigan, a vast array of food, wonderful entertainment and a number of gifts. The veterans were escorted to Navy Pier by 25 motorcyclists from Rolling Thunder. The Purple Heart Cruise sailed for the first time in 1945, under the leadership of Chicago Sun-Times columnist Irv Kupcinet. Kup, as he was affectionately known, began the cruise to serve the veterans returning home from WWII. Kup made sure that a Purple Heart Cruise sailed every year until 1995. In 2007, Kup's grandson, David, re-launched the Purple Heart Cruise to serve a new generation of troops. Special thanks to Hines Recreation Therapists Joanne Milas, Kathy Harms and Becky Philips for organizing Hines' veteran participation.



supervisors are provided with copies of completed "Feel Good Grams" that describe their excellent customer service skills. In addition, every time an employee receives a "Feel Good Gram" he or she is entered into a monthly drawing. Winners of the monthly drawing receive a \$25 gift certificate from the Canteen and are recognized in the facility newsletter.

In addition to implementing the new "Feel Good Grams" the facility is now featuring a new Employee of the Quarter/Year award. The Employee of the Quarter Award recognizes the work and contributions of employees at Hines VA Hospital and affiliated Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

Nomination forms are simple to fill out and employees are encouraged to nominate their co-workers for these awards. A special subcommittee of the Employer of Choice Committee, made up of employees from throughout the facility, has been established to select winners of the award.

The winner of the Employee of the Quarter Award will receive a \$250 cash award and have their nomination form and photo featured on the Hines intranet site and in the hospital newsletter. Winners of the Employee of the Quarter awards will be automatically eligible to be selected as Hines Employee of the Year. Employee of the Year winners will receive a \$500 cash award, as well as 8 hours of time off. This exciting new program, sponsored by the Hines Employer of Choice Committee, is yet another way that Hines is proud to recognize their excellent and very dedicated employees.

#### Recognizing Service Excellence

Recognizing employees for excellent customer service is a top priority at Hines. It is particularly important that the hospital give patients an opportunity to provide positive feedback about dedicated employees.

The Hines Services Excellence Committee implemented a new program designed to solicit input directly from patients. "Feel Good Gram" forms are now included in every inpatient admission folder and are available in all hospital outpatient clinics. Patients are encouraged to write down their positive experiences with Hines' staff on these forms and turn the forms in to the clerk in the clinic or to a charge nurse on a unit. Any employee can accept a "Feel Good Gram" on behalf of the hospital.

Since the program was unrolled in early August, patient response has been tremendous. More than 100 patients have filled out "Feel Good Grams." Employees and their

#### Canteen Opens for Business

Newly-remodeled and open for business, Hines' Canteen Retail store offers wider aisles and a more modern environment for employees and veterans. Associate Director Nate Elam (pictured left) and Jim Sipple (Canteen Manager) cut the ribbon at the grand opening in August.



## Annual Pride Day

More than 200 Navy Petty Officers participated in their Annual Pride Day on Friday August 29. The instructors and trainees went to Navy Pier and the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. In the afternoon they visited Hines as a group to meet with veterans on the inpatient medical and rehabilitation wards. Patients like Mr. Evan Johanssen (pictured center) were thrilled to see these very special visitors. Special thanks to Voluntary Service for putting together this very special visit.



## Successful Diversity Day/Employee Picnic

The 2008 Diversity Day Employee Picnic was a successful event. Hundreds of employees braved the heat on July 15<sup>th</sup> to attend the festivities which included refreshments and multi-cultural entertainment. Thanks to the Hines Picnic Committee for their hard work and dedication.



## Iron Mountain

### Vans Donated to Transport Veterans



Keys were handed over by Joseph D. Goniea, DAV Hospital Service Coordinator (center) received by Jason C. Petti, Associate Medical Center Director (left), and Gregory C. Weiss, Chief, Voluntary Service (right).

As part of the nationwide DAV Transportation initiative, the VA medical center has recently received two vans from the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

These two vans will be utilized in the South Range and Sault Sainte Marie areas, driven by a corps of local volunteers organized by the DAV and its auxiliary. The vans will be used to transport veterans to the medical center for care.

## Annual Patient Carnival

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Iron Mountain held its annual patient carnival on Thursday, July 10, 2008. Sponsored by veteran service organizations and the VA Voluntary Service Committee, the carnival included live music, exciting games, and refreshments for patients and their families. We sincerely thank the volunteers for providing such an entertaining and event filled afternoon. A great time was had by all!





*Pictured here, patient, William Neu, enjoys one of the many games at the carnival with assistance from two young volunteers.*

## Float Wins Patriotic Division

The annual Iron Mountain-Kingsford Independence Day Parade was held on Friday, July 4, 2008. The weather was perfect, parade entries were high and spectators were some six deep in many places lining the streets of Iron Mountain and Kingsford, Michigan.



Iron Mountain VA Medical Center won 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Patriotic Division with its “Raising the Flag over Iwo Jima, 1945” float. This float symbolizes Marines of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 5<sup>th</sup> Division, capturing Mt. Suribachi during the battle for Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945; it has become an enduring image of bravery and heroism. The theme for this year’s parade put on by Americans for Constitutional Enforcement (ACE) was “Salute America, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”

## Jesse Brown

### Crown Point CBOC Expands

To expand the capacity of its Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Crown Point, Indiana, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (VAMC) has announced plans to replace the facility with a much larger CBOC that will be leased from a builder.

The number of veterans using the Crown Point facility continues to increase. In fiscal year 2007, it received more than 100,000 outpatient visits – more than a 25 percent increase above the number of visits just three years ago.

Formally named the Adam Benjamin, Jr. VA Outpatient Clinic, the facility is one of four CBOCs in the Jesse Brown VAMC system. It is located 55 miles southeast of Chicago in northwest Indiana, where over 70,000 veterans reside. The clinic has 119 full-time staff members and offers primary health care and many specialized services including general surgery, audiology, dental, eye care, podiatry and women’s health.

VA has received bids from contractors to develop a 55,000-square-foot structure covering approximately nine acres. The winning contractor will own the new building and lease it to VA to operate. The site chosen at 93<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Madison Street in Crown Point is directly behind the existing 40,000-square-foot clinic, which is also leased. The contract is expected to be awarded by early next year.

Complimentary transportation via three round trip shuttle runs daily to the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago for many northwest Indiana veterans who require specialty outpatient and inpatient care. Nationwide, VA medical centers continue to expand or open new CBOCs to increase veterans’ access to health care services. “VA is dedicated to providing the best in health care to the men and women who have served our nation in uniform,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “Community-based medicine makes preventive care easier for patients and permits easier follow-up with chronic health problems.”

## “Health Champions” Urge Veterans to Get MOVEING

Veterans waiting for their clinic appointments at Jesse Brown VAMC are being approached by staff members who encourage the veterans to join them in a 10-minute bout of exercise.

JBVAMC was the recipient of a mini-grant from the VA HealthierUSVets program to motivate patients in waiting areas to exercise. A number of employees are serving as “Health Champions” by distributing fitness bands, exercise DVD’s and fitness books in the primary care clinics. The Champions then demonstrate various forms of exercise and encourage patients to join in.

Patients are also being instructed on how to use the Nintendo Wii program and receive complimentary vouchers for fresh fruit or bottled water they can redeem at the VA Canteen.

The effectiveness of the program is being monitored through the use of opinion meters set up in the medical center which ask questions about healthy eating and activity.



*JBVAMC staff members Valerie Boone (from left), Jenny O’Donohue and Alice Whitman demonstrate the use of fitness bands, which are easy to carry and can be used to stretch and exercise a variety of body muscles.*

## Affiliate Hosted Moving Vietnam Wall



Iraq War veterans who are students at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) sponsored an appearance of the Vietnam Veterans Moving Wall on the UIC campus as a salute to Vietnam-era veterans. The memorial was on display from September 4 through September 8.

Jesse Brown VAMC, which is affiliated with the UIC College of Medicine, shuttled veterans back and forth to the memorial and participated in an Opening Ceremony that, unfortunately, was sparsely attended due to a driving rainstorm.

Members of JBVAMC’s OEF/OIF Outreach Team have worked closely with the UIC students in the past, particularly while planning and implementing the medical center’s very successful “Welcome Home” Celebration that was co-sponsored with Hines VAH.

## Madison

### Get Back on Track

In June 2008, Madison VAH initiated a weekly running group for OEF/OIF veterans, offering an alternative organized activity for veterans to stay healthy and manage stress. The group meets each Wednesday at 6 AM at the University of Wisconsin track facility. Evidence exists that proves exercise helps to lower stress and improve mood. The organizers of the group include Eileen Ahearn, MD, Mental Health Service; Lori Phelps, PhD, Clinical Psychologist; Cari Myles, OEF/OIF Outreach Coordinator; and Scott Krueger, Manager, Community Relations Service.



## Milwaukee

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce Development- SAW – A Change of Direction



Having fun at work, Carnice Dixon, a housekeeping aide at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, is moving up the ladder with completion of the SAW program which has changed her life. She is now a graduate of the inaugural class of the School at Work (SAW) program at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Charles Wallace, EEO manager at Milwaukee, oversees the program and calls it a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce development system that brings education and career counseling to the worksite. "It is a way we can take advantage of our diversity and the potential talent we have on board."

For Dixon, who has worked at the medical center for eight years, her path began while waiting for an elevator and seeing a SAW flyer. From that time forward, things have been different. "It just clicked," said the enthusiastic 40-year old talking of her SAW experience. "I feel like now I can explore new jobs around here. The class was so informational to me. I have so many options." Her advice to others: "If anybody really wants to move on in the workplace, the SAW program is great. The hardest thing about the program is actually finding out what you want to do afterwards. SAW is a tool but you have to do the rest."

The SAW program boasts wide spread acceptance as it is incorporated at over 250 hospitals nationwide including 52 VA medical centers. Milwaukee is the only site in VISN 12. The nine-month program is designed to provide employees/students with the basic skills necessary to succeed in a local college or move up the career ladder at work. The course work is divided in two-parts consisting of 16 learning modules. Topics include reading workplace documents, writing skills, time management, communication skills, math in the workplace, medical terminology, stress management and interviewing skills.

On August 29, at the SAW graduation ceremony, James Roseborough, VISN 12 Network Director, presented Dixon and nine of her classmates with certificates of completion. He told the graduates to be proud of their efforts and talked of the continuing commitment to achieve goals. "This is more of a beginning than an ending."

Dixon is very grateful to her co-workers for their support during the nine-month course.

A second class will be starting in Milwaukee. The program is nine months and the class meets weekly. If you are employed by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and are interested in applying, please contact Charles A. Wallace in the EEO Office (telephone 47129).

### School is in Session

Back to School at the John H. Bradley VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, Appleton, WI, was the theme of staff's recent monthly meeting August 22nd. The day began at 7:45 a.m. as the staff stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. In mid morning, it was a milk break and at lunch, the cafeteria lunch trays were printed with "Got Milk." Another big hit were pictures of staff members from their school days; a contest to pair up the pictures and the stories with the current staff. There were plenty of wrong guesses.

After lunch, there were clinic announcements followed by history/social studies lessons with John Maino. Maino is familiar to the staff as he is a 20 year veteran of radio and television in the Green Bay area. He authored the

book; "Frontlines: World War II Personal Accounts of Wisconsin Veterans."

Maino went to Iraq with the 432nd from Ashwaubenon, WI in July for 10 days. The 432nd is a Civil Affairs battalion that works with the civilian population. He took over 26,000 pounds of textbooks and school supplies that many of the Clinic staff helped to collect along with beef jerky, phone cards, sole inserts for boots, DVD's, sunflower seeds and CD's he gave to the troops.

During his lesson, Mr. Maino shared some of his stories from Iraq. "Iraqi children love American textbooks and are really looking forward to starting school." His next project is to collect Barbie dolls, Beanie Babies and stuffed animals for the children. The Clinic staff then received their homework assignment – to help him.

Afternoon recess followed including VA Olympic events. Featured events included wheelchair racing, golf putting, and a racing event. At the end, of course, there was the medal presentation. Then it was back to work knowing that graduation was just around the corner... in June.

## Freedom Flag Flying

The Red, White and Blue flowed in the breeze at the Milwaukee VA MC welcoming veterans and bikers visiting Milwaukee for the Harley-Davidson 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The flag, the size of a basketball court, was suspended from a 140 foot crane in one of the medical center's parking lot. David Whittaker, founder of and coordinator of "Freedom Flag" donated the use of the flag and the crane for the event.



## North Chicago

### Dignitaries Visit and Tour North Chicago Facility



*Dr. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health touring the ICU during a visit to North Chicago VAMC; an opportunity to see first hand the work being done towards the VA/DoD Partnership.*

Congresswoman Melissa Bean from the 8th Congressional District of Illinois met with VA and Navy local officials to learn more about the VA/DoD Partnership between the North Chicago VA Medical Center (NCVAMC) and the Naval Health Clinic Great



Lakes (NHCGL).

*Congresswoman Melissa Bean learns more about VA/DoD partnership.*

## North Chicago VA Medical Center Hosts the VISN 12 Culture Transformation Committee



North Chicago VA Medical Center hosted the VISN 12 Culture Transformation Committee on May 30, 2008. Nursing Home Culture Transformation is a national VA initiative to emphasize patient-centered care and make the environment more homelike. The multidisciplinary VISN committee, composed of representatives from each VISN 12 facility, meets with the purpose of developing shared goals, exchanging ideas and helping to shape the vision of nursing home care in VISN 12. Members from Hines, Iron Mountain, Jessie Brown, Milwaukee, North Chicago and Tomah were in attendance at the May meeting.

The Committee Chairman, Patricia Ten Haaf (Nurse Executive at Tomah) led the discussion on changes in the environment and philosophy of care which have been shown to make a positive impact on nursing home culture, resident satisfaction and resident function. Each site presented its progress to date. The North Chicago report included the monthly Sunday brunches, freshly baked cookies (a customer satisfaction initiative), the culture transformation staff retreat, and decorating changes. An important part of the National VA Culture Transformation initiative is the name change from "Nursing Home" ("SGRC") to "Community Living Center." Stay tuned for notice of the official name change and the events organized to proclaim it.

## US Flags Flown at Fallujah Surgical in Iraq Donated to NCVAMC



*Patrick Sullivan, Marianne Semrad, Jim Bockeloh, Mary Ann Cardinali, and Tariq Hassan gather in front of framed flag and certificate in the ED department*

While Jim Bockeloh was stationed in Iraq last year, he decided to mail the four U.S. flags that were flown at Fallujah Surgical on Veterans Day 2007 to North Chicago VA as **"a remembrance to the vets we take care of."** Each flag came with a certificate and a letter explaining how it was flown. The flags are displayed in the Emergency Department, new entrance, Bldg. 131, and the 4th placement to be determined.

Mr. James Bockeloh joined the North Chicago VA Medical Center in December 2006 as a Nurse Practitioner working full time in the Emergency Department (ED). He is responsible as a provider of emergency medical care for all DoD, dependants, and VA patients. He has a Masters in Nursing, is a certified Nurse Practitioner, and is certified in Emergency Medicine. He is currently working on his doctorate in nursing at Marquette University.

Mr. Bockeloh has been in the military since 1971. From 1971 to 1979, he was on active duty in the Army and then left for three years. Since 1983, he has been in the Navy Reserves. He currently is a Drilling Reservist assigned to Surgical Company A, 4th Medical Battalion, 4th Marine Logistics Group. He currently plans to stay in the Reserves, but could retire any time. Mr. Bockeloh

has been deployed three times, twice to Iraq. He was there in 2004-2005 for 11 months, and most recently from August 2007-March 2008. This last time he was assigned to a Shock Trauma platoon located in Fallujah, Iraq. His duties included serving as a Nurse Practitioner/Provider in the Shock Trauma platoon (like an ER), as well as serving as the En-Route Care Coordinator (like a Chief Flight Nurse). He coordinated the flight nurses' education as well as supervising the helicopter critical patient transport program in Fallujah. He also provided education for Iraqi medical providers and nurses, and coordinated continuing education programs and outreach medical programs.

## Annual Car Show



Blue skies, 86 degrees and a light breeze made for a perfect day at the 5th Annual Car Show for veterans on Sunday, July 27th, 2008. Veterans, employees, and families were able to see 191 vehicles, spanning 9 decades from around the world. The oldest entry was Waukegan Fire Department's 1921 Stutz Fire Engine, winner of the Director's Choice Award. Ms. Haley McLaughlin who created and coordinates the car show, along with Community Affairs and Recreation Therapy, brought her 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO-R.

Donations from Jewel Foods, Boy Scout Troop #109 from Wood Ridge, Jelly Belly, the Elks, Ocean Spray, and the McLaughlin family made it possible to have hot

dogs, brats, chili, chips and soda. Great "oldies" music from the 50's, 60's and 70's was provided by Memory Makers of Grayslake.

At the end of the day the Director's Choice award, and the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place Veterans Choice awards were presented. It ended with a parade past the main buildings for the patients who could not make it out to the car show. The car owners were touched by what they saw stating that this is unlike any other car show they attend and truly enjoyed spending the day here giving our Nation's heroes a well deserved "Walk Down Memory Lane" to remember and cherish.

## Tomah

### WWII Veteran Receives Medals 62 Years After Service

On August 21, Tomah VA veteran Merlin Tweed, finally received his World War II medals, including a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Combat Infantry Badge.



Trempealeau County Veterans Service Officer Bill Thoma worked diligently to request the medals. In a ceremony for Mr. Tweed, Acting Director Jerry Molnar pinned the awards on the long-deserving veteran.

Mr. Tweed was injured in Germany while clearing out "pillboxes" along the Siegfried Line.

## Air Force Flight Demonstration Team Visits

Four members of the F-16 West Coast Demonstration Team, also known as “Viper West,” visited veterans at the Tomah VA in August.

The demonstration team, out of Hill Air Force Base north of Salt Lake City, Utah, is one of two Air Force F-16 demonstration teams. The team was at an open house at Volk Field and scheduled the VA visit while they were in town.

One of the Viper West team members said, the Tomah VA was “full of living legends.”



*Pictured with the Viper West team, from left, are living legends, Charles Oness, William Bendrick and Willard Larson.*

## Platoon Run XXII a Huge Success

For the 22nd year, motorcycles and cars from all over the State – and beyond – found their way to the Tomah VA on August 24 for the annual Platoon Run Car and Motorcycle Show.



Perfect weather found volunteers escorting patients around the parking lot to view the vehicles and admire, reminisce and discuss the vast array of entries.

Several veterans served as judges and they selected the best car, motorcycle and “Best of Show.” The Best of Show was a 1957 Ford Fairlane 500, whose owner, Tom Roberts of Princeton, was making his first appearance at the Platoon Run.

## Donors See the Results of Their Gift

Last September, ALM Charities in Onalaska, Wisconsin, held a golf outing to which officials of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) were invited. Why? Because ALM Charities had selected the DAV as one of the recipients of a donation – a large donation: \$13,000. The funds were earmarked toward the purchase of a new van for the Tomah VA’s DAV Transportation Program.

The new van arrived in June and in August a group representing the DAV took the van to Onalaska, WI, to show the donors what the veterans received as a result of their hard work and generosity.



*Cindy Gluch, VAVS representative for the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary and retired DAV Transportation Coordinator, (center, blue jacket) presents a plaque of appreciation from the Disabled American Veterans to members of the ALM Charities.*

## Dairy Month Properly Celebrated

June is Dairy Month and it was properly celebrated at the Tomah VA in 2008!

The inspiration of Recreation Therapist Jennifer Conzemius, activities were planned throughout the month of June. Activities included the game, "Name That Farm Tool," a milk mustache contest, June Dairy Day "Jeopardy," and cheese tasting. Special bulletin boards were created as well.

During the month, each ward was given a large blank canvas with a cow drawn on it. The veterans were encouraged to design their own cow as they wished. The veterans designed and painted their cows with the help of recreation therapists and assistants.

The celebration peaked at the end of the month at the "June Dairy Days" event, which included the judging of the cows and presentation of awards, as well as ice cream sundaes, cow chip throwing contest, visiting farm animals, antique tractors on display, dairy posters and hay bails to set the "mood."

Veterans and staff were invited out to join in the festivities. The Parade of Cows consisted of seven large paintings, one of which, winner of the "Most Wisconsin Pride" Award, is shown below.



## CARES

### Phase III of VA/DoD Partnership Moving Forward



On Monday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new parking garage was held along with a groundbreaking ceremony for the ambulatory care center. The \$16 million parking and infrastructure project is complete and soon work will begin on the \$71 million four-story ambulatory care center that will be adjacent to Bldg. 133 at the VA. This is the final phase of the VA/DoD Partnership.

Over 350 people were in attendance including officials from DoD, VA, staff from Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes and North Chicago VA Medical Center, U.S. Congressman Mark Kirk from the 10<sup>th</sup> District of Illinois, veterans and active duty military and community members. Also in attendance was James A. Lovell, retired Navy captain and astronaut who the federal health care center will be named in 2010, the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center.

The garage will be utilized for patient, handicapped and visitor parking. Immediately following the activation of the parking garage construction work will begin on the ambulatory care center.

## Network Awards and Recognition

### Prestigious Awards

**Richard Greenblatt, PhD**, Hines Executive Psychologist was recently selected for the Leadership Award from the Association of VA Psychology Leaders. Dr. Greenblatt was honored with the award for his long record of accomplishments in promoting services to veterans and the role of psychologists in providing those services. Congratulations to Dr. Greenblatt on this prestigious recognition.

Hines researcher **Dr. Joan Stelmack** and her research team for the Low Vision Intervention Trial were awarded the Award for Outstanding Contributions in Research and Literature in Low Vision from the Low Vision Division of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired at their Chicago Meeting, August 22.

Congratulations to Hines Researcher **Charlesnika Evans, PhD**, who was recently honored as the first health sciences and VA recipient of the Paralyzed Veterans of America Research Foundation's Fritz Krauth Memorial Fellowship. "The ever-increasing challenge of drug resistance is a perplexing one for medicine across the world – and particularly in the area of spinal cord injury medicine, where frequent infections occur," said Randy Pleva, PVA president. "Dr. Evans' work is particularly exciting in this area."

Dr. Evans will use the fellowship, a one year post-doctoral grant, to study VA medication prescription trends for SCI veterans using the VA's pharmacy database.

Hines recently had the honor of hosting a visit from a group of Medal of Honor Recipients. This distinguished group visited veterans in Spinal Cord Injury, the Community Living Center, the Blind Rehab Center and 15 East. They visited with veterans and exchanged military stories. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government. It is bestowed on a member of the United States armed forces who distinguishes himself

"...conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States..." Recreation Therapists and staff from the Blind Rehab Center escorted the recipients during their visit.

### VA Federal Women's Program (FWP) Outstanding Achievement Awards

**Karen A. Tolonen**, Licensed Practical Nurse, at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Iron Mountain received the Federal Women's Program Outstanding Achievement Award on Tuesday, August 26, 2008. An award recipient must promote the advancement of women through professional, personal or civic contributions. Mrs. Tolonen was recognized for her reliable and high quality work; she is steadfast in her duties and has solid leadership qualities. Her co-workers describe her as being efficient, helpful and a strong role model. She also participates in the annual Walk for Cancer community event.

Jason C. Petti, Assoc. Medical Center Director, presented Mrs. Tolonen (pictured right) with the Federal Women's Program Outstanding Achievement Award at a reception held in her honor as part of the VA medical center's celebration of Women's Equality Day.



Eight exceptional female employees of the Tomah VA were nominated for the Federal Women's Program Outstanding Achievement Award. This annual award is a chance for co-workers to bring attention to a special person in their midst.

The celebration kicked off with a special presentation from an area woman, Bishop April Larson, of La Crosse. She is the first woman bishop in the Lutheran church in North America and second in the world.

**Carol Harmon**, Facilities Service Line, was the recipient of the 2008 award. She was recognized for her impact on the Tomah VA due to her work with projects throughout the medical center, but also for her contributions to the community, namely, the Tomah Area Cancer Support.



### Madison Researcher Featured on 60 Minutes

Morley Safer, recently came to Madison to interview **Dr. Richard Weindruch** concerning his caloric restriction and aging research. Filming took place at VAH Madison Animal Research Facility and in labs in the Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC). Additional filming in Madison was done at the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center.



Dr. Weindruch's research receives national media attention each year. He is an investigator for the VAH Madison GRECC and is a Professor in the Department of Medicine, Section of Geriatrics and Gerontology for the University of Wisconsin. The interview is anticipated to air some time in October.

### VAH Madison Nursing Services Innovation Award

The VAH Madison Nursing Service received one of the ten 2008 VA Office of Nursing Services Innovation Awards for the project, "Patient Centered Shift Handoff." Of the 41 national entries, Madison's entry was named one of the "best of the best" by Cathy Rick, Chief Nursing Officer.

The VAH Madison nurses identified a need for improved communication between staff and patients on medical and surgical units. Evidence guided the development of this handoff process, a process that highlights our nursing autonomy and our commitment to patient-driven care. The patient-centered handoff process involves the patient; improves patient safety; satisfies patients; and makes nurses accountable for their professional practice.

Team members worked to develop and implement the handoff process with staff on their respective units. The team will be formally recognized during the annual VA Nursing Leadership Conference in 2009, where each team will present a poster of its award-winning innovation. In addition to receiving an individualized plaque, the team will receive a \$10,000 monetary award to be divided equally among its members.

Congratulations to this outstanding group of individuals on this accomplishment and their commitment to innovation and quality patient care.



*Nursing Innovation Award Group front row left to right: Donna Miller, Mary Schmidt, Mary Hartmann, Bev Priefer and Jacalyn Sutton. Back row left to right: Molly Brunner, Sue Clearfield, Sarah Schroeder, and Teresa Van Wagoner. Missing: Laura Pafford, Dennis Clapp and Becky Kordahl.*

## Interior Designer of the Year

**Rena Alswager-Klein**, VAH Madison Interior Designer, was named the 2008 Interior Designer of the Year for VA. She was selected based on her innovativeness, impeccable standards, positive attitude, outstanding performance, and her tireless dedication in support of the mission and goals of the Environmental Program Service, Veterans Health Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Alswager-Klein was honored to receive the award and accepted it in recognition of all the VA designers and personnel involved in providing an environment that is supportive and therapeutic for patients and staff.

## President of the American Society of Health System Pharmacists

**Lynnae M. Mahaney**, Chief, Pharmacy Service at VAH Madison, has been elected President of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP). Mahaney's practice focus is medication safety including medication reconciliation and technology integration. She joined the VA in October 1999 in her present position



at Madison, where she has expanded the inpatient and outpatient clinical pharmacy services and residency programs. Mahaney has been involved on the VISN and VA Central Office levels with leadership development, recruitment and retention of pharmacists and technicians, and the changing demographics in the pharmacy profession. She speaks and writes frequently on these topics.

ASHP is a 35,000-member national professional association that represents pharmacists who practice in

hospitals, health maintenance organizations, long-term care facilities, home care, and other components of health care systems. ASHP is the only national organization of hospital and health-system pharmacists and has a long history of improving medication use and enhancing patient safety. Mahaney has previously served ASHP on the board of directors, and in a variety of committees and other roles.

## Geriatric Scholar

**Dr. Beatriz Somoza**, physician at the VAH Madison community based outpatient clinics (CBOCS) in Baraboo and Beaver Dam, was selected to be a Geriatric Scholar by the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center at the Los Angeles VAMC. Dr. Somoza attended the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual UCLA Intensive Course in Geriatric Medicine and Board Review in September, and will participate in the Geriatric Scholar program throughout 2009. There were only 10 slots available across VA CBOCs nationwide for this program and Dr. Somoza was selected for one of them!

## Wernick Honored

The Greater Madison Federal Agency Association selected **Laura Wernick** of the VAH Madison as their Federal Employee of the Year in the support category. Wernick's nomination stated she has had an illustrious 50 years of federal service; has trained numerous employees and served as a role model; and most importantly, she has provided world-class customer service to our nation's veterans and their families. She recently retired from her position as Executive Assistant in the Hospital Director's Office.

## Golden Anniversary Celebrated

**Katherine (Katie) Couture**, RN, PhD, clinical instructor for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, was surprised by staff and students on unit 7C at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. Couture celebrated her golden anniversary as a nurse and considers it a privilege to be at the VA.



*Shirley Larson, RN, MSN, division manager, nursing med-surg and critical care, presented Couture (left) a certificate of appreciation for her years of service to veterans as a nursing student looks on.*

Couture completed her undergraduate work at Marquette University graduating in 1958 and her doctorate at the University of Wisconsin in 1991.

She loves taking care of people and making a difference. She has been at the Milwaukee VA for 13 years and has enjoyed the staff on 7C and spinal cord injury units. She enjoys the medical center because on every unit she has a former student. "I just love it!" She talks of the challenges of nursing education and how it has changed. "Teaching and learning go together. I learn every day at the VA and share that with my students and others."

## VFW Employee of the Year



*Pictured from left: Dr. Hassan, Chief of Staff; Marge Ferraresi, Kinesiotherapist, John Allen, Kinesiotherapist, Dick Kutz, VFW, and Dr. Uma Shah, Chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.*

The VFW nominated **John Allen** for the VA Employee of the Year for the State of Illinois and he was selected as this year's winner. Dick Kutz of the VFW presented John with the award and a Wii game to be used by the veterans during their rehab visits.

John has been a Kinesiotherapist here for 34 years. He lives in Lake Villa, but is originally from the south side of Chicago and he received his degree from University of Illinois-Chicago. He is the Lead Kinesiotherapist, works in the Rehab clinic, and is also the primary pool therapist.

John says he really enjoys working with his veterans and he is still always learning something new.

We thank Dick Kutz and the VFW for this special recognition and congratulate John on this much deserved award and for representing the VA so well with his many years of services to our Nation's veterans.

## Retiree Comes Out of Retirement

**COL Ronald Lepianka** retired from the U.S. Army September 4, 2008, following a 24-year career of distinguished military service. He was awarded the Bronze Star for exceptional meritorious service in Iraq serving as the Multinational Forces Iraq - Dental Surgeon and the Legion of Merit which is awarded for meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements on his retirement after 24 years.

COL Lepianka served in the Air Force and the Army, both active duty and reserve and distinguished himself as the Army Dental Consultant serving as the Multinational Forces Iraq - Dental Surgeon, while assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Medical Command in Iraq 2006-2007.

Dr. Lepianka returned to his position as VA dentist at North Chicago VAMC in September 2007 after serving in Iraq. He has served 5 years for the Department of Veterans Affairs at North Chicago and also 10 years at the Tuscaloosa VA. Dr. Lepianka plans to continue at North Chicago and begin administrative/VA Leadership training.



*From left: Dr. Richard Furman, Chief of Surgical Service NCVA, MasterSgt Luis Diolazo, COL Ronald Lepianka, COL Robert Richardson, Dr. Tariq Hassan, Chief of Staff, and Dr. Leanne Fredrickson, Chief of Dental Service.*

## Nursing Excellence Award

Congratulations to **Vicki Peterson**, Tomah VA's recipient of the Secretary's Nursing Excellence Award for Nursing Assistants. Peterson works on Home Sweet Home (406A). Ms. Peterson (above left) is pictured receiving the award from Trish Ten-Haaf, RN, PhD, Assoc. Director for Patient Care Services.



## International Exhibit

**Dr. Douglas Lanska**, Staff Neurologist at the Tomah VA Medical Center and Professor of Neurology at the University of Wisconsin (Madison), was the Associate Director of an extensive international exhibit on the "History of Movement Disorders and the History of Chicago Neurology" at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders in Chicago from June 22-26.

The extensive exhibit traced the historical evolution of the medical understanding and treatment of Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders, as well as the development of movement disorders as a medical discipline of neurology. The exhibit covered 16 subtopics concerning movement disorders, with multimedia materials presented on 36 3-by-8 foot panels, seven glass cases, and two continuous video presentations.



## Secretary's Volunteer Service Award



**Cindy Gluch** (above center) received the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary's Volunteer Service Award in June. This is the highest volunteer award in the VA. The award was presented by Jerry Molnar, Acting Medical Center Director.

A VA volunteer since 1992, **Mrs. Gluch** was recognized for her outstanding commitment to the veterans served by the DAV Transportation Program, for which she served as coordinator for seven years.

She was cited for her excellent work at recruiting and retaining volunteer drivers; recruiting donations so new DAV vans can be purchased, and her overall deep compassion for veterans.

She has also volunteered throughout the facility at recreation activities, special events, the DAV's Christmas Gift Store, etc. She serves as the facility's VAVS Representative for the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary and is a member of the VAVS Executive Committee.

## Jerry Molnar Named VAMC Director

**Jerald D. Molnar** has been named the Tomah VA Medical Center's 18th director, effective August 31.

Molnar has been serving as the Acting Medical Center Director since June 2007, when Stan Johnson transferred to the VA in Seattle, Washington.

Molnar's first assignment at Tomah VAMC was in 1993. In that role, he was responsible for the administrative operations of the facility. He also assisted on the Network level, being responsible for the coordination of the Imaging Services, as well as Pathology and Laboratory Medicine activities for the Network's seven VA medical centers and their Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

Molnar lists his "personal goals" as customer satisfaction. "The term 'customer satisfaction' covers it all," he said, "because our customers are our patients, employees, volunteers and the public."

Being familiar with the facility has its advantages and disadvantages, according to Molnar. "There's an advantage to having someone new come in to a position like that of Director," he stated. "Fresh eyes are usually good. Being that I've been here for several years, I need to be careful to avoid the tendency to maintain status quo. On the other hand, I do not want to make unnecessary changes, particularly in the first weeks of this assignment. I plan to ask key questions, listen to the answers, and see what people think we need to address. I want to know what individuals hope their new director will bring to the facility, as well as what they prefer; so these values are not unnecessarily changed by a new leader."



“I’ve been with the VA for thirty years,” Molnar stated. “My first job was providing hands-on care as a rehabilitation therapist. That is a tremendous background to have when you work in healthcare administration, as it provides empathy for the needs of patients.”

Molnar has also served as Associate Director for the Iron Mountain and Albuquerque VA Medical Centers. He completed his Associate Director Trainee Program at Albuquerque VA Medical Center in 1992. Prior to this, Molnar held several positions of increasing responsibility at Grand Junction VAMC, Tuscaloosa VAMC, and Waco VAMC.

In 1981, Molnar received his Master of Science in Health Care Management from Southwest Texas State University. He also has a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Education from State University of New York, College at Buffalo.

Mr. Molnar is an ex-officio member of the Tomah Chamber of Commerce and serves on the Board of Directors of Tomah Memorial Hospital. He is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives. He completed the Leadership VA Training Program in 1995 and the Health Care Leadership Institute Program in 2004.

## Vets Return Victorious From 28<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games

An estimated 500 wheelchair athletes made the “Quest for the Best” at the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, July 25-29, 2008, in Omaha, NE.



The Wheelchair Games are a multi-event sports and rehabilitation program for military veterans who use wheelchair for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations, or certain neurological problems. The event is presented by the U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), with financial assistance from corporate, civic and veteran service organizations.

Competitive events include swimming, table tennis, weight lifting, archery, air guns, basketball, nine-ball, softball, quad rugby, bowling, hand cycling, wheelchair slalom, power soccer, a motorized wheelchair rally, track and field.

Fourteen athletes and three coaches (Jill Kalkofen-Jacobsen, Mary Terese Squeo and Philip Chiaramonte) from the Hines VA Hospital team attended the games. The athletes participated in air rifles, archery, bowling, nine-ball, table tennis, weight lifting, slalom, track and field, and trapshooting. Hines’ veterans took home 36 medals!

The Milwaukee VA Medical Center had 22 athletes attend the Games. Last year, the Wisconsin team hosted as the Games were in Milwaukee; “Great Games on a Great Lake.”

Over 1,450 athletes, coaches, family members and friends were at the Quest Center for the closing banquet. The Tuesday night soiree was the culminating event of five days of intense competition for the athletes and coaches, but now it was ending. It was winding down and while it was fun, it was also exhausting.

Athletes were waiting to hear who the winner of the Spirit of the Games was to be. The speaker read the stellar achievements of the winner. To the Wisconsin athletes it began to sound like someone they knew. A picture appeared on the large video screen prematurely for a millisecond. It was Gus. The talk was getting louder at the Wisconsin tables as Lou Slangen, Senior Vice President of Global Sales and Marketing for the Invacare Corporation, made the announcement: “I am honored to present the 2008 National Veterans Wheelchair Games Spirit of the Games winner – athlete number 266 from Sturtevant, Wisconsin – Gus Sorenson.”

Use your imagination for what happened next as the video screen came alive with pictures of Sorenson in competition. The athletes were pumped.

Gus Sorenson was a great choice.

“It was the farthest thing from my mind that I would be ever chosen for that,” said Sorenson reflecting on the moment. “This can’t be happening!” He was shaking so much he was afraid he would drop the trophy. In his thank yous from the podium, he gave a message to all veterans with disabilities: “It’s not what you lost; it’s what you have left.” He complimented the athletes calling them the finest group of people he has ever met. “You make me proud to be an American.”



With 20 years of National Veterans Wheelchair Games experience backing him, this former president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America was first surprised and then humbled with such an honor.

The Spirit of the Games award is given to an athlete who clearly demonstrates not only athletic competence, but also sportsmanship and strength of character. Sorenson, described by his many supporters, is humble, kind, encouraging and giving.

Sorenson, 60, has a natural knack for putting people at ease. One Spirit of the Games ballot reads, “Gus is a very friendly and approachable individual who is always willing to help others and serves as a mentor to new [returning] athletes. Despite his quiet demeanor, Gus is a pillar to Team Wisconsin – someone who can be counted on as a dependable team member. I know that when I feel like giving up in a workout or race, I think to myself, ‘Gus wouldn’t quit,’ and that inspires me to keep going.”

Sorenson has been in a wheelchair for 39 years. “I’ve been disabled for a long time, and I’ve come to terms with my disability, says Sorenson, a combat veteran of Vietnam.

**Today Sorenson works full time as the Government Relations Director, Wisconsin Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, where his primary focus is monitoring legislation that affects veterans and advocating for individuals with physical**

**disabilities.** He is also involved in several other assignments such as writing grants, preparing newsletter material and fund raising.

Sorenson enjoys the sports and the camaraderie at the Games, but most of all, he loves the people. And at the Quest Center, on that last day, in the midst of a thunderous standing ovation, he found the people loved him back.

Gus Sorenson is welcomed back at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. At the 2008 National Veterans



Wheelchair Games

in Omaha, he earned gold medals in quad rugby, table tennis and bowling and a bronze in discus and shot-put.

## Golden Age Games

Seven veterans from Tomah VA competed at the National Veterans Golden Age Games in Indianapolis in August. The team collectively brought home one gold and four bronze medals. They are already making plans to head to Birmingham, Alabama next June to compete.



The team from front row, left: Bob Bothner and Cyrus Gloff. Standing, left to right: Marilyn Jilek, RN; Pat Soulier; Bob Burrier; Ken Macklin; Ron Deline; Galen Sheridan; and Todd Weibel, PT Asst./Co-Coach. Missing: Vicki Burkhalter, NA and Pat Leinen, PT Asst./ Co-Coach.

## Welcome Home Celebrations

# Welcome Home!

**Iron Mountain VA Medical Center** hosted its first Welcome Home Celebration for all returning Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans and their families on Saturday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the medical center. Approximately 200 veterans, family members, and community residents participated in this celebration.

The Welcome Home event was celebrated to honor those who answered the call to duty. It was not only a time of celebration but also a perfect opportunity to inform the veterans of the numerous VA benefits available to them. Veterans enjoyed pizza, fresh fruit and vegetables, beverages, and a variety of desserts; children were entertained with games, prizes, tattoos, face painting and yes, even hundreds of water balloons; music was provided by a karaoke system and many talented volunteers; and numerous door prizes were awarded to veterans. In addition to providing an afternoon of entertainment, representatives from VA and local community agencies were present to talk to veterans about benefits and opportunities available to them. It was a very informative and fun filled afternoon for everyone!

The medical center extended a special thank you to all those who contributed to the success of this event: Krist Oil Company, Chuck and Sandy Lantz, Ann Podnar, Bink's Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Ron LaDuron, Home Depot, Wal-Mart, R A S Distributing, Inc., the local Military Order of the Purple Heart organization, Iron Mountain Daily News, local radio stations, medical center staff and local volunteers. This celebration would not have been possible without their gracious donations.

Another celebration was held at the **Madison VA Hospital in June**. The event took place on Flag Day at a Madison Mallards baseball home game. The weather

tried to be a challenge, including heavy rain and even hail shortly before the game, but the skies cleared and sun came out just in time for the twilight game.



*The opening pitch was a team effort; from left, Andy Schuster, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Director of Public Affairs, Deborah A. Thompson, Director VAH Madison, OIF veteran Jason Madaus and his sons.*

The hospital OEF/OIF Team partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, the Wisconsin National Guard, the Madison Vet Center, and the American Legion to help make the event a success. Free admission to the park, the game and food, was made possible by a generous contribution by the American Legion. A total of 210 OEF/OIF veterans and their family members were in attendance.

The purpose of the Welcome Home Celebration was to reach out to our newest veterans (many of whom have been deployed multiple times) and provide information about VA health care and benefits. The OEF/OIF Team and other VA staff were on hand to show their support, provide information and enjoy the festive event with the veterans.

The OEF/OIF Program provides an array of services to our newest veterans including: outreach at demobilizations, reintegration events, Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRAs), advocacy education regarding VA health care and benefits, counseling and crisis intervention, family support and education, group screening and assessment for newly enrolled veterans,

and clinical case management for seriously ill and injured veterans

***VISN 12 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) team members representing VA facilities at Madison, Milwaukee, and Tomah, along with Madison VA Mental Health team leaders, recently traveled to Fort McCoy in support of "Operation Enduring Brats (OEB)-II".***

Following great success from last year's visit to the Wisconsin National Guard's (WNG) annual summer training, the VA was again invited to participate in this collaborative effort to maintain and strengthen communication bridges between WNG soldiers and the VA Health Care system.

"Operation Enduring Brats" (as in the famous Wisconsin sausage), headed by WNG retention officers, involves serving up hot brats to hungry, hot, and tired soldiers training for upcoming deployments to Operation Enduring Freedom and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF).



The soldiers, most of whom are facing their second and third deployments for OEF/OIF, were warmly greeted by VA staff, served a brat, asked if they were enrolled in the VA health system and given general information about the VA.

The VA staff, many of whom donned helmets and protective gear for a Humvee ride to the simulated

forward operating base, were able to have a "micro" exposure to military life style.

All who participated remarked on what a beneficial experience it was. VA staff members were able to appreciate some of the demands of soldiering and the soldiers were able to see that VA staff cared about them.

After being assured that, yes indeed, the visitors to Fort McCoy were really VA staff, one soldier told, SSgt. Daniel Killam, his retention officer "...they (the VA) really get it."

Further VA outreach events with the Wisconsin National Guard are planned in support of the soldiers and their families prior to, during, and following upcoming deployment. And, of course, planning for next year's "OEB III" is starting!

## **Valet Parking Initiative Successful at VISN 12 Facilities**

**Jesse Brown VAMC** began offering free valet parking services to veterans on July 21 and plans to offer the service at its Lakeside CBOC in the near future. Although less than 200 cars are parked weekly by the valet service, JBVAMC expects the positive word-



of-mouth reaction from veterans utilizing it will result in greater use, especially with winter just around the corner.

Leland Cooklock says that he "gets good service" at the **Milwaukee VA Medical Center**, and the valet parking is just an extension of that service. Cooklock of Greenfield, WI is one of 130 patients who benefited from the newly inaugurated service at the medical center one day this summer. That was a typical day according to Doug J. Sewell shift supervisor of Advantage Valet Parkin, Inc.,

the valet parking service serving the medical center. “Some days we have parked over 160 cars.” Sewell says the reaction has been good from the veterans coming to the medical center for appointments. They assist veterans to wheelchairs or escort them up the slight grade to the lobby of the medical center. Sewell says the veterans like a friendly greeting. “It is all about customer service.”



One of the most popular services offered to veterans at **Hines VAH** is the new Valet Parking Service, which began on campus in mid-July. Hines averages more than 1500 outpatient appointments every day. In the past these patients, many of whom were elderly or in poor health, would have to walk to the main hospital clinics from the farthest parking lots on campus. Now, these same patients can drive up to the front entrance of the facility and be greeted by a friendly, professional driver who will help them into the building and then park their car. The patients can go directly to their appointment and not worry about where to park. After their appointment, they return to the front of the facility and the valet drivers retrieve their cars immediately. **Patient response to the new valet service has been tremendous.** The facility has already received numerous complimentary letters on the new service and the service was mentioned in a recent OEF/OIF Focus Group as being very positive.

“This new valet parking service is the best thing going,” said Al Turnerst, a Vietnam veteran who has been

coming to Hines for over 15 years. “The drivers are so courteous and they actually run to get your car. It makes a world of difference for us when we come here for an appointment.”

Every week, more patients take advantage of the new valet service. Currently, approximately 650 cars are parked weekly by the valet service. Hines is expecting even more patients to take advantage of the service as word gets around and the colder winter weather sets in.

“We are proud to offer our veterans this service,” said Nathan Geraths, Hines Director.

Madison VAH veterans will be able to take advantage of this benefit come October. **Madison VAH** will be implementing their free valet parking for patients on October 1st. Initially, 80 parking stalls will be dedicated. The program will be piloted for one year with renewal potential. If the response is as positive in Madison as it is at other VISN 12 facilities, the program will be renewed come next year.

The free valet service at **North Chicago VAMC** will be offered for all patients and drivers with disabilities or who need extra assistance at Bldg 133CA entrance. Valet services for patients will start at 7:00 a.m. and conclude at 4:30 p.m. or later, on normal work days (Monday – Friday, excluding federal holidays). “Patient Valet Parking” drop off signs will be placed at strategic locations along the routes.

Veterans are encouraged to take advantage of this service available at participating VISN 12 facilities. We hope this will help in making visits to the health care centers a little more pleasant.



## VA Provides Training in State-of-the-Art Psychotherapies to Treat PTSD

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is providing national training in state-of-the-art psychotherapies to enable its mental health clinicians to provide the most effective and proven treatments available to help veterans overcome Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

By expanding its training programs, VA will enable more veterans than ever to receive the newest evidence-based psychological treatments, such as Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (PE) Therapy, two psychotherapies developed specifically for PTSD.

Evidence-based psychotherapies are those that have been scientifically evaluated and shown in randomized clinical trials to be more effective than other treatments or no treatment. ***VA is the first national health care system to undertake a broad national initiative to use evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD.***

In 2007, VA began a national initiative to train VA mental health clinicians on how to use Cognitive Processing Therapy through an intensive interactive training program involving attendance at a workshop, incorporating role playing and ongoing follow-up in which a consultant works directly with the therapist in applying the therapy with their patients. More than 1,100 mental health professionals have received this training to date.

VA also began similar training earlier this year to enable clinicians to utilize Prolonged Exposure Therapy. About 150 clinicians have been trained so far, and training will continue over the next few years.

“VA is strongly committed to making evidence-based psychological treatments available to all veterans,” said Dr. Bradley Karlin, VA’s Director of Psychotherapy Program. “This intensive training will enable VA to become even more effective in treating patients with PTSD and other mental illnesses.”

According to Dr. Karlin, recent reviews and reports, including a report by the Institute of Medicine, have confirmed that psychotherapies such as Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy are effective for PTSD and at least, if not more, effective than medication in treating PTSD. “In Cognitive Processing Therapy, the therapist helps the patient confront the symptoms of PTSD and the thoughts and behaviors that contribute to and maintain them,” Dr. Karlin said. “During the therapy, the patient comes to develop more realistic and balanced evaluations of the trauma and of oneself following the trauma.”

For example, a veteran who may suffer from PTSD after firing on a fast approaching car at a checkpoint may harbor the belief that killing that person was their fault and, as a result, they may experience significant guilt. During therapy, the patient may learn to come to a more realistic evaluation of the situation and replace the original thought with the idea that firing their weapon was done as a last resort, thus leading to reduced guilt.

Exposure therapy is based on the idea that people learn to fear the thoughts, feelings and situations that remind them of a traumatic event. This avoidance usually strengthens the patient’s fear. By talking repeatedly with the therapist and overcoming avoidance of such reminders and their internal emotional experiences, patients can change the feelings they have related to the trauma.

In Prolonged Exposure Therapy, the patient learns relaxation techniques to help them through imagined exposure exercises in which he or she recalls memories of the traumatic experience that were previously avoided.

“We are fortunate today to have treatments for PTSD that are proven to work, and VA is actively working to bring these state-of-the-art treatments from the laboratory to the therapy room,” Dr. Karlin said. “The intensive training VA is providing to clinicians nationwide is revolutionary and will transform the way mental health care is delivered to veterans. The end result will be better treatment for our nation’s heroes who have PTSD.”

## My Health\_eVet Receives Awards

My Health\_eVet—the web-based portal that enables veterans to create and maintain a personal health record—has received two major awards from organizations that focus on effective use of Internet technology.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA)'s Office of Information has been selected to receive one of the prestigious 2008 "CIO 100 Awards" in recognition of its innovative use of information technology at its My Health\_eVet web site ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).) The CIO 100 award program recognizes organizations around the world that exemplify the highest level of operational and strategic excellence in Information Technology.

VA developed My Health\_eVet to be a one-stop location for veterans of all eras to receive critical medical and benefits information and to provide ways for veterans to input and view some of their own medical records online.

Earlier this year, My Health\_eVet was selected as the Gold Award winner for Best Practices in Consumer

Empowerment and Protection Awards in the Category of Patient/Consumer Safety by the Utilization Review Accreditation Committee (URAC). URAC is an independent nonprofit group known as a leader in promoting health care quality through its accreditation and education programs.

My Health\_eVet was also selected earlier this year as winner of the 2007 "Top 5" Excellence Gov Awards for innovative technology for the American Council for Technology's Industry Advisory Council, a nonprofit education organization established to assist government in acquiring and effectively using information technology resources.

"These awards demonstrate how VA and its leaders continue to provide innovative information technology solutions to enhance veteran and employee health, and improve the quality of care VA's health care system provides," said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "I encourage America's veterans and others to log on to My Health\_eVet and forge a new partnership with us to make their health care decisions."

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Network Director (10N12)  
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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