



Two VISN 12 Employees Provide Assistance in Haiti



Alana Sutter (second from right) with some of the Haitian orphans early in her visit before the earthquake.

Alana Sutter, Madison VAH Registered Nurse, was participating in a medical missions trip to Haiti to provide some care at an orphanage and mobile clinics just outside Port-au-Prince for a week in January when the earthquake occurred. The days that followed were filled with triaging the wounded, including by flashlight at night, and providing care with the very limited resources available. The injured were transported by friends or family members on mattresses, make-shift gurneys, and even wheelbarrows.

The aftershocks that followed the earthquake were so frequent and large that the screaming continued to echo throughout the city of Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas.

“The clinic courtyard was filled with Haitian children screaming “Fe Ma!!”-Creole for “I hurt!” Flies infested their wounds,” Sutter said. “We treated fractures with Tylenol and cleansed cement-embedded gashes with only hydrogen peroxide and antibiotic ointment. I believe we made a small impact while in Haiti, but it is bringing home their story that I hope will have a greater impact. It is a story of devastation, poverty, unbelievable human trials, and yet a story of survival against odds. My vision is to be a voice for the too often unheard and forgotten and a life-long advocate for the Haitian people.”

Dr. Allison Murray, a resident of Highland Park, Ill., volunteered to be part of the Veterans Health Administration’s Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System, otherwise known as DEMPS. The system maintains specific information about volunteer medical staff in the event of a disaster and a request for federal assistance.



According to Donna Gonzalez, North Chicago VA Medical Center DEMPS coordinator, she received a request from the national and regional DEMPS program managers requesting an anesthesiologist.

“It’s a very complicated selection process,” said Gonzalez, a resident of Twin Lakes, Wis. “In this instance, the volunteer anesthesiologist needed to have at least a tourist passport, a VA travel credit card, specific immunizations and medical clearance, and be able to leave on a very short notice.”

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Before leaving, Murray explained that she simply wanted to do the most good in the short amount of time she was in the country. She noted that she was not nervous or excited for the trip, but more anxious to get there and help. Since returning, she explained that the experience in Haiti was sometimes alarming, but always amazing. “We made it through another 4.7-magnitude earthquake while I was there,” she said. “Even through that, our patients were always wonderful, always grateful, and willing to wait hours. Honestly, I don’t remember hearing them complain once.”



Remembering the experience, Murray (above center) made it clear that her professional team made all the difference. “My DMAT team was absolutely fantastic,” she said. “The entire came together under third-world conditions. There were no egos on the team, and the Haitian people were clearly thankful for our help.”

New Under Secretary for Health

Robert A. Petzel, M.D., was appointed Under Secretary for Health in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on February 18, 2010. Prior to this appointment, Dr. Petzel had served as VA’s Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health since May 2009.

As Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Petzel oversees the health care needs of millions of Veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the nation’s largest integrated health care system. With a medical care appropriation of more than \$48 billion, VHA employs more than 262,000

staff at over 1,400 sites, including hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, domiciliaries, and Readjustment Counseling Centers.

In addition, VHA is the nation’s largest provider of graduate medical education and a major contributor to medical research. More than eight million Veterans are enrolled in the VA’s health care system, which is growing in the wake of its eligibility expansion. This year, VA expects to treat nearly six million patients during 78 million outpatient visits and 906,000 inpatient admissions.



Previously, Dr. Petzel served as Network Director of the VA Midwest Health Care Network (VISN 23) based in Minneapolis, Minn.

In that position, Dr. Petzel was responsible for the executive leadership, strategic planning and budget for eight medical centers and 42 community-based outpatient clinics, serving Veterans in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, western Illinois and western Wisconsin.

Dr. Petzel was appointed Director of Network 23 (the merger of Networks 13 and 14) in October 2002. From October 1995 to September 2002, he served as the Director of Network 13. Prior to that position, he served as Chief of Staff at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

Dr. Petzel is particularly interested in data-based performance management, organization by care lines, and empowering employees to continuously improve the way we serve our Veterans.

He is involved in a collaborative partnership with the British National Health Services Strategic Health Authority. In addition, he co-chairs the National VHA Strategic Planning Committee and the VHA System Redesign Steering Committee.

A Fisher House for Hines



Hines took possession of its brand new Fisher House in mid-February and the house opened in early March. Already a number of patient families have stayed in the brand new house, which is a beautiful home-away-from-home for the families of Hines patients to stay in while their loved one receives treatment at the hospital.

Hines has created an electronic consult that will assist staff in identifying potential Fisher House candidates and referring them for placement. Hines social workers will be integrally involved in the process of placing families in house. Families of any Hines patient who reside more than 50 miles from the facility or experience more than a 2 hour commute are potential candidates for staying in the Fisher House.

Hines held an open house for staff to tour the new Fisher House in mid-February. "Our employees are so proud to be able to offer our patients accommodations in such a beautiful place, right here on our campus," said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. "The excitement and enthusiasm among the staff is incredible."

The official ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Hines Fisher House is scheduled for the Friday before Memorial Day, May 28th and will involve hundreds of community supporters as well as dignitaries from Washington DC and beyond. Support in the Chicago community for the new Fisher House has been tremendous. In early February, State Farm Insurance Company made a \$50,000 donation to the Fisher Foundation. Sharon Helman, Hines Director, accepted the generous donation in a ceremony at the House.

In addition, a story about the Hines Fisher House appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* in February. The story featured pictures of the house, along with an interview with a Hines Veteran and his wife, who would be a

prime candidate to stay in the Fisher House in the future. The Tribune story can be found at: <http://www.chicagobreakingnews.com/2010/02/new-fisher-house-to-open-just-outside-downtown-chicago.html>.



A group of second graders from the University of Chicago Lab Schools recently delivered 500 books and games they collected for Hines

Fisher House. These students learned about the Fisher House and spent the last two months soliciting donations by telling the Fisher House story.

"The Fisher House touches the people who protect our freedoms," said Nicole Power, the second grade teacher whose class took on the project. "They take care of us and protect our country. The children really found meaning in that." WGN News in Chicago broadcast live from Hines when these children presented their donations.



William Dawes (pictured left), an Eagle Scout, took on the challenge of raising money to purchase books and games for the Hines Fisher House. He appeared live on WGN radio 720 with Steve Cochran (pictured) at the Chicago Auto Show, to discuss his goal of raising funds and supporting our Fisher House. He recently presented the Hines Fisher House with three van loads of items gathered through his hard work and dedication.

Finally, the Naperville Exchange Club and Operation Support our Troops donated more than \$100,000 directly to the Hines Fisher House through their Veterans Day Naperville Healing Field of Honor Fundraiser.

From Nov. 8-14, 2009, American Flags on Rotary Hill in Naperville paid tribute to all Veterans and their families and everyone who has ever served our great nation. Each of the 2009 flag were purchased by an individual or community group in order to raise money to the Hines Fisher House

This patriotic exhibit of flags on Veterans Day was a sight to behold. Holly Wright, Hines Fisher House Manager, spoke at a ceremony honoring those who bought flags as part of this display.



A Naperville couple commissioned a local artist to paint a portrait of the impressive Healing Field.

A limited number of prints were produced of the painting and are being sold by the group to raise even more money for the Hines Fisher House. The original painting of the Healing Field was donated to the Hines Fisher House and will be prominently displayed for all our Veterans and their families to see.

Chicago VAs Expand Welcome Home Celebration

In partnership with the Student Veterans of America, Jesse Brown VAMC and Hines VAH will host a Wounded Warriors Summit & 3rd annual Welcome Home celebration for Veterans on Saturday, April 24, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the University of Illinois at Chicago Forum, located at 725 W. Roosevelt Road in Chicago.

The Illinois Warrior Summit is open to all Veterans and their families, with an emphasis on serving returning Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and active duty service members.

Approximately 100 community, government and service organizations will provide information on employment, Veterans' benefits, health care and other community resources to assist Veterans in their transition to home and family. Over 50

Chicago-area employers who are actively recruiting to hire Veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are expected to attend, as well as representatives from 20 colleges and universities.

Workshops have been scheduled throughout the day to provide information on resume' building, preparing for job interviews, the GI Bill, obtaining VA home loans and VA health benefits. The event will also offer free health screenings, food, massages and raffle prizes including a seven-day vacation and tickets donated by Chicago professional sports teams. A Kids Corner will offer face painting, a magic show and Jumbo Moon Bounce for Veterans' children.

The National Anthem will be sung by Ms. Illinois and live entertainment will be provided by several rock bands.

Last year's Welcome Home celebration was attended by 400 people and attendance at this year's program is expected to be even larger. "An event of this magnitude has never been done before," said Rob Malnik, Illinois State Director for the Student Veterans of America. "This is a great opportunity to welcome home the troops that served our country and get them the benefits and job opportunities they deserve."

Network News

Hines

Ribbon Cutting Fun

There have been a lot of ribbon cutting ceremonies at Hines over the past several months. In early January, the facility opened a brand new Outpatient Floor, housing Surgery Outpatient Clinic areas. The new location offers patients modern surroundings in a location that is much closer to the rest of the patient care activities that take place on campus. The new surgery clinics are now open on the 5th Floor of Building 200 and so far patient response has been tremendous.

"Our patients are very excited about our new clinic space," said Jody Azzolin, Clinical Nurse Manager. "The staff is also very proud to serve our Veterans in the newer, larger and brighter clinics.



Jody Azzolin, Clinical Nurse Manager of the Surgical Subspecialty Clinic area and Dr. Raymond Joehl, Chief of Surgery, cut the ribbon on the new Hines Clinic, as Hines top management looks on.

“The new hallway greatly improves patient and employee access to the SCI Building and ensures that patients can go between the main hospital and the SCI Building without going outside or cutting through the basement.



More than 150 construction (remodeling, upgrading, etc.) projects are ongoing at the facility and according to Brian Duce, Chief of Hines Project Planning Division, contractors are hard at work throughout the facility, hoping to complete some very exciting new projects in the very near future.

“We are constructing a brand new Women’s Clinic on the 12 Floor of our hospital,” he said. “This new clinic will be more than double the size of our current Women’s Clinic and will offer Women Veterans amenities like a lactation room, changing tables and additional restrooms.”

In addition, work is underway on a project to remodel the 5th Floor of Building 228. When this project is complete, Prosthetics will be housed in a much more convenient and modern location.

“Providing top quality health care to our nation’s Veterans in the most modern and most convenient of surroundings is a top priority for us,” said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. “It really is ‘All About the Veteran’ at Hines.”

Very Special Visit



The National Commander of the AMVETS, Duane Miskulin (pictured right) and Illinois AMVET Commander Rudy Spaulding, (center) visited Hines for a tour and a briefing in February. Both gentlemen toured the facility with Sharon Helman, Hines Director. They were particularly impressed with the AMVETS Reactivation Center, where Dr. Peg Baumann (left) showed them around.

Jesse Brown

Sgt. Freddie Nutribear Enhances Veterans Nutritional Care

Button 2.75 x 2.75



Clinicians working in any hospital can tell you there are times when doctors and other staff get so busy they may miss important recommendations in patient progress notes or may be unavailable for consults.

Since people remember concepts better when accompanied by pictures, the Food & Nutrition Service staff at Jesse Brown VAMC (VAMC) developed the idea of using Sgt. Freddie Nutribear as a visual nutritional alert.

Veterans identified with nutritional issues receive a brochure with a picture of an unforgettable Teddy Bear in a Sergeant's uniform. The brochure explains to the Veteran and family that the patient has nutritional issues which are being addressed. The Teddy Bear is holding a fork to emphasize that the dietitian and other members of the healthcare team "are on guard for the patient's nutrition care."

A card on the wall of the patient's room includes Sgt. Freddie Nutribear's picture, the dietitian's name and the date of the last nutrition progress note, and serves as a reminder to physicians and other staff that the patient has an important nutritional issue. This visual prompt reinforces nutritional issues that have been communicated with the physician either through writing or verbally.

The inpatient medical and nursing staff members have been educated to recognize this logo. The clinical dietitians and clinical diet techs wear Sgt. Freddie Nutribear badges to identify the team as one that provides nutrition care. The attending physicians use the sign as a prompt to ask the resident what the nutritional problems of the Veteran are and how the issues are being addressed.

The program is very popular with inpatients and their families, and JBVAMC Veteran patients can take comfort in knowing the ever vigilant Sgt. Freddie Nutribear is standing guard to look after their nutritional needs.

Raising Awareness of Heart Disease Among Women



In recognition of National Women's Heart Disease Awareness Month in February, members of Jesse Brown VA Medical Center's Women's Clinic

held an informational Open House on February 19 to discuss the high incidence of heart disease among women and what can be done to deter it. Studies have shown many women are unaware that heart disease is their #1 killer and still more do not acknowledge their own personal risk.

Heart disease disproportionately affects women of color. African American and Hispanic women, in particular, have high rates of the major risk factors for heart disease, including obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure and diabetes.



Employees at JBVAMC (shown above) and its Crown Point Community Based Outpatient Clinic (below) also commemorated National "Wear Red" Day on February 5th – a day when Americans nationwide wear a red dress, shirt or tie to show their support for women's heart disease awareness and unite in this life-saving movement.



Employees at Crown Point Community Based Outpatient Clinic commemorated National "Wear Red" Day on February 5 to show their support for increased awareness of women's heart disease.

Madison

Patient Safe Handling Training



In early October, the first, full-day Safe Patient Handling Unit Peer Leader (UPL) Training was conducted at the Madison VAH. Thirty-three UPL's attended from all inpatient units, as well as Radiology, outpatient clinics and the morgue. The goals of the training were to

offer peer leaders the tools needed to support and nurture a culture of safety related to the handling and movement of patients, hopefully impacting positively on the number of patient care related injuries. Along with slide presentations, many interactive activities were used including role playing, networking games, and hands on equipment practice. A Safe Patient Handling binder was distributed for each unit which included resources for equipment use, care planning, algorithms to assist in determining the type of equipment required and guidelines for leading a "safety huddle." As part of the VA Safe Patient Handling Initiative, UPLs are a required element in fulfilling the requirements for compliance.

A hospital-wide ceiling lift installation will occur in FY2010 which will include lifts being installed in nearly all inpatient units, Radiology, Rehab and the morgue as well as the Community Living Center, once it is completed. Unit Peer Leaders will be instrumental in the training of staff in the safe and proper use of these lifts, along with fostering a culture of safety.

Moving Day for ADTP/CWT

In January, the Addictive Disorders Treatment Program (ADTP) and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program at the Madison VAH moved into the completely renovated Building 7. The renovation project started in December of 2008, and included adding

central air conditioning, expanding the size of the building by 2000 square feet, and completely renovating the entire space.



The ADTP is located on the top level, accessed by the door at the front of the building. The CWT program is located on the lower level, with a separate entrance on ground level. There is an internal staircase to assist with traffic flow between the two areas. Each level has a main reception desk along with offices and meeting rooms. Restrooms are available on both levels. The lower level also has a computer lab that Veterans in the programs are able to utilize to perform on-line job searches and create resumes.

Black History Month Celebration



The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Committee at Madison VAH hosted a celebration in honor of Black History Month on February 12th. Dr. Carter G. Woodson launched Black History Month in 1926 as an initiative to bring national attention to the contributions of black people throughout American History.

Woodson chose the second week in as it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

This year's celebration included guest speaker, Michael Jackson, Dane County Veterans Service Officer; musical entertainment provided by the Gspelaires; and sampling of authentic Caribbean cuisine.

Pain Control Comfort Cart Established



What do swimming noodles, socks and tennis balls have to do with comfort? Recently, the Madison VAH Pain Committee approached the Community Relations

Service staff with

a request to purchase swimming noodles, socks, and tennis balls to help provide comfort for Veterans with pain. What's the connection? Tennis balls and swimming noodles have just the right balance between soft and firm to apply soothing pressure to sore aching muscles. Roll a two-foot length of a swimming noodle back and forth along the spine between your back and a chair for a massage. Or, put one or two tennis balls in a sock and lean against them to press them into a sore, tight muscle.

The Pain Committee has assembled a Comfort Cart with not just the noodles and tennis balls, but also hand-held vibrating massagers, ear plugs, CD players and relaxation CDs. Items that can be cleaned are loaned to the Veterans for use in the hospital (CD players, massagers). All other items are a gift to the Veterans that use them.

Translation Services

Madison VAH provides translator services to assist Veterans and their families. Interpreters are provided to assist in the delivery of medical care when the use of a common language is not possible. It is the policy of the Madison VAH that language barriers will not prevent medical care.

The primary source for interpreter services is the Language Line, maintained by the Madison VAH Call Center. Language Line is available 24/7 and provides interpretation over the phone. Staff initiate contact with Language Line interpreter services when telephonic interpretation is deemed adequate to meet the patient's needs. In-person interpreters may also be scheduled through this service. When phone

interpretation won't work or isn't practical, in-person interpretation is arranged. A list of staff who are fluent in a second language is maintained at this hospital. These interpreters may be contacted when a need is identified. A range of languages are covered by these interpreters with the primary second language being Spanish. When specific language needs that cannot be met by the Madison VAH interpreters are required, contact with the University of Wisconsin Hospital is initiated. When possible, they provide an interpreter who is specifically trained in medical terms, patient privacy, etc. Madison VAH also maintains a contract with Professional Interpreting Services in Milwaukee for Sign Language.

Health care providers should use these sources regardless of the presence or availability of family or friends. Interpretation of medical information cannot be compromised by accidental omissions, substitutions or family relationships which might influence the process. Care must be taken to ensure that both patient confidentiality and objectivity are safeguarded if a patient insists that friends or family serve as interpreters. If this occurs, remind the patient that interpreters are available to them at no cost. When staff are in a situation where a phone interpreter is needed immediately, they contact the Madison VAH Call Center for assistance. Advance needs for in-person interpreters are arranged through the Social Work Service.

Milwaukee

Green Team Garners Gobs of Globes

Call him the Green Guy. He doesn't care. But Mike Thompson isn't from another planet, even though that's how some might have looked at him when he started this gig about five years ago. Planet Earth is where he calls home, and that's the place he's trying to save as the Zablocki VA Medical Center's Green Environmental Management Systems coordinator, or GEMS, for short.

Together, with Ed Eisenhauer, Zablocki's chief of operations and maintenance, the two have pounded home the message of reuse it, recycle it, and not to mention, "Would it kill you to turn off the light if you're not in the room?" That perseverance has paid off.

Zablocki received Green Globe certification for its efforts to achieve sustainable energy – one of 15 medical centers across the VA, and the first to achieve it within VISN 12. The medical center received three out of four Green Globes by the Green Building Initiative, an independent environmental building rating agency accredited by the American National Standards Institute.

The rating criteria includes building energy efficiency, low greenhouse gas emissions, conservation and protection of water, waste recycling, indoor air quality, employee use of public transportation, and other factors. As a federal agency, the VA is under executive order to have 15 percent of its buildings incorporate these practices by 2015 – a target that Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said will be surpassed.

Ensuring the sustainability of our facilities across the country gives us energy efficient buildings to accomplish our primary mission – serving veterans with the best care,” he said. Thompson said when he started the job five years ago, it took time for people to understand what he was trying to accomplish.

It wasn't negative,” he said, “it was just getting people to change habits, and increase awareness. Now people don't call me the GEMS coordinator. They say, ‘Oh, you're the green guy’ and I'm OK with that. Now people call and ask if something can be recycled, or they come up with ideas to save money.”



One example is the Supply Processing and Decontamination department, which used to use a blue, plastic wrap while bundling medical tools. It would be used once then thrown away.

Bonnie Tullberg, chief of the division, came up with the idea to pack the same supplies in reusable metal containers that can be cleaned and sterilized. Although there was an initial investment in the containers, they will pay for themselves in less than two years, saving more than \$40,000 annually.

A Facilities Maintenance crew also replaced all the regular, incandescent light bulbs in the Building 123 domiciliary with the swirly, compact fluorescent bulbs. Although they cost more initially, each bulb lasts an average of five years

Instead of just carting off cardboard and paper to a landfill, the two have a contract with a recycling company that comes and picks up the material at a fraction of the cost. As more people catch the recycling bug, the numbers increase each year. In fiscal 2006, Zablocki collected 468,000 pounds. In fiscal 2009, that increased to 608,000 pounds.

“It's not just about protecting the environment, it's about being good stewards of our tax dollars,” Eisenhower said. Even with the prestigious award, neither is ready to coast because the Green Globes require recertification each year, and both are still on the lookout for places to do the right thing.

“One of the biggest things we do is just work on education,” Thompson said. “We remind people to turn off lights when they aren't in a room. If the patient load is lower on a Friday, do you need the lights on in all 10 exam rooms when only two of them are being used? Some people might not think about it because it's the VA's money, but it's all of our tax dollars.”

Not Your Average Yogi



Andy Hendrickson knows all too well the stories and scars that Vets bring home from the battlefield. While they fought the war, he helped repair their physical wounds as a nurse and officer in charge of the 452nd Combat Support Hospital during a 2003 deployment to Bagram, Afghanistan. Now Hendrickson, part of an outreach group for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans at Zablocki, is helping to heal mental wounds, too. The registered nurse taught a yoga class every Friday afternoon and evening classes every Thursday through February 25 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the recreation hall, Room 3435.

Classes were open to everyone but targeted especially for those Veterans looking for a way to relax and heal as part of an overall treatment plan.

Besides being a practitioner, he was also recently certified as a yogi. It can help you think more clearly and make sense of things," Hendrickson said. "There are a lot of things in life you can't make sense of. But during this time, the focus is on the here and now. In yoga, you focus internally, and you let go of those thoughts of the past and the future."

Hendrickson, 55, first took yoga classes as a physical education requirement while he was a student at the University of Utah in the early 1970s, then did it on and off over the years. In Afghanistan he treated not only wounded soldiers, but also children and other family members hurt by landmines planted decades earlier.

"I start doing yoga again every night to relax and calm down after working with blown up people," he said. "It calms the body. It calms the mind and reduces the heart rate." As someone who has been there, done that, and isn't afraid to talk about it with Vets, Hendrickson believes that helps him connect with Veterans like Ben Sebena. The 25-year-old Marine came back from his second tour in Iraq in 2004 after getting wounded in a mortar attack. His best friend died in the attack. As he was flown to Germany then rushed by ambulance to Landstuhl Medical Center, he couldn't help but get angry at cars following too closely.

Back in the states, Sebena would race his car down side streets of his hometown, going 80 in a 30 mph zone, blowing past stoplights, daring cops to pull him over. He was doing something – anything – to repeat the rush of combat. "People come back sometimes messed up in the mind, and they drive crazy, they have unprotected (risky) sex, they're always looking for that thrill to recreate the adrenaline rush and fear of being in combat, and nobody talks about it," Sebena said.

"It starts out with a six-pack, then a 12-pack, then an 18-pack, and that's when I decided I didn't want to go down that route," he added. While getting initial treatment for his injuries at Zablocki, a nurse talked to him about his combat experience and asked if he wanted to see a counselor.

"I found out I had (post traumatic stress disorder) and didn't even know what that was," he said. "But for the first time I found out there was a reason for the nightmares and what I was feeling."

He soon met Hendrickson through the medical center's multi-faceted approach to treating Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, and has been coming to yoga classes for about a year. "It's very relaxing from a mental aspect," Sebena said. "I can come here and let everything else go for an hour, once a week. My wife has supported me and this is my gift back to her. She doesn't want to repress feelings. I owe her."

On a quiet Friday afternoon at Zablocki – far removed from the fighting overseas – Hendrickson led Sebena and another man through a variety of yoga stretches and breathing exercises. All is calm. All is right. At least right now. In this moment, Hendrickson speaks in a soft, soothing voice as he leads the group through a variety of stretches and breathing routines. "Let everything go," Hendrickson says quietly. "Let everything go and think about your breath. Yoga can be selfish, because you look at the here and now, you let everything go and you think about your breath."

For Sebena, it's one small part in his treatment. For his part, he looks at himself as a "Big Brother" encouraging other Marines to enroll in the VA for treatment. "For me, I first came in because of the mental aspect, but I really enjoy it," he said. "I tell my friends about it, too, because they're coming back (from Iraq and Afghanistan). Some of them still see the VA negatively, or they think it's not for someone their age, or there's a stigma to them coming here. But I like to tell them it can help, and to not be afraid to speak up. "If you don't speak up, and you keep it all inside you," he said, "then it'll just eat you up."

North Chicago

House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Members Tour Health Care Center

Members of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, along with Department of the Navy and Department of Veterans Affairs leadership, toured the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the Naval

Health Clinic Great Lakes Jan. 4 to learn more about the progress of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center.

The group was led by Chairman Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) and Ranking Member Dr. Phil Roe (R-TN), both from the House Veterans Affairs' Committee, Subcommittee for Oversight and Investigations. Rear Adm. William R. Kiser, Commander, Navy Medicine East, Assistant Secretary Joan Evans, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, and Assistant Secretary Roger Baker, Office of Information Technology, were the ranking Department of the Navy and Department of Veterans Affairs members.

"This was an opportunity for us to show our political officials and department oversight members the progress we have made with our complex integration," said Patrick L. Sullivan, North Chicago VA Medical Center Director. "Not only did it give them an ability to see the progress of what will be our combined mission, but it allowed them an avenue to ask questions from our subject-matter experts."

The group made their first stop in North Chicago as part of a 3-day oversight tour through Illinois and California. The visit included an update of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, a first-of-its-kind integration between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and familiarization tours of the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes and North Chicago VA Medical Center.

On Oct. 1, 2010, the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center will be the nation's first partnership between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense, integrating all medical care into a fully integrated federal health care system with a combined VA and Navy mission.

"Treating Veterans with Care" Training

With a goal of implementing the Treating Veterans with "CARE" program -- or Connect, Appreciate, Respond and Empower -- across the Veterans Integrated Service Network 12 community, a group of highly-motivated VA employees from each of the 7 medical centers in the VISN gathered at the North Chicago VA Medical Center recently to develop an implementation plan for the CARE program.

"The CARE program teaches staff how to communicate more effectively with Veterans," said Virginia Edingburg, North Chicago VA Medical Center customer service coordinator. "While this leads to increased patient and employee satisfaction, the true focus of this program is to serve our patients in the absolute best manner."

According to Master Trainer Ron Richard, National Employee Education System project manager, will provide two foundational skill sets to support the Veteran Centered Principles: Enhance the quality of human interactions and therapeutic alliances; and, support and sustain an engaged workforce.



Gail Meissen, Madison VA Medical Center patient education coordinator, tosses a stuffed desk toy to Mary Anne Gibler, Iron Mountain VA Medical Center Equal Employment Opportunity specialist and patient representative, during recent Treating Veterans with "CARE" training at the North Chicago VA Medical Center

"By the end of the training, we'll have a strong implementation plan for the entire VISN," said Richard. "We're providing this training to representatives in the entire network of facilities to empower them with the skills to meet the highest level of patient satisfaction."

Lisa Murphy, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center patient services assistant, noted that there was a clear connection for the participants between the training and providing the best patient care.

“We’re here to meet the healthcare needs of our patients,” said Murphy. “Research has proven that with improved customer satisfaction, there are improved healthcare outcomes. This is why we are here. We owe it to our Veterans to give them the best possible care.”

This sentiment was shared with most of the participants during the group workshop portion of the training, including Mary Anne Gibler, Iron Mountain VA Medical Center Equal Employment Opportunity specialist and patient representative.

“Why reinvent the wheel?” asked Gibler. “We can discuss and refine some of those best practices out there. In the end, it helps each of us to bring a sense of ownership to employees, and I really think that this makes all the difference. The whole point is bringing better care to Veterans.”

“Banana Men” Delivers Potassium Smiles



When considering the one thing that Veterans are given when visited in the medical center, few would probably guess bananas. Still, this is exactly what the Masonic “Banana Men” have been delivering to Veterans for more than 14 years at the North Chicago VA Medical Center.

“We’re giving our Veterans so much more than just a banana,” said Richard Vanderhoef, Masonic Service Association State Coordinator and Chairman/Field Agent for the Grand Lodge Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Illinois. “We’re reminding them that we still appreciate what they’ve done for our country. It’s not so much the banana itself, but more what it represents.”

Every Thursday, Vanderhoef, along with Alvie Green and Hardy Evans, Masonic Service Association representative and deputy representative for the North Chicago VA Medical Center, load at least 80 pounds of bananas on their cart and walk around the medical center, delivering bananas to patients.

For more than a decade, Green has been delivering the bananas. While Green has been volunteering at the North Chicago VA Medical Center for nearly 20 years, he takes great joy in delivering the fruit and meeting the Veterans.



“These guys are thinking of the Veterans, and that’s really important,” said Korean War Navy Veteran Francis Richard after receiving a banana on a recent Thursday. “They’re bringing us something we don’t normally get, plus it’s healthy and full of potassium.”

Vanderhoef is quick to point out that a banana is really the perfect item to deliver to patients. “Let’s look at the facts,” said Vanderhoef. “Bananas are naturally pre-wrapped; they’re completely hygienic; they’re nutritious and soft. Plus, there are little worries about diabetes. And if that weren’t enough, they’re also biodegradable.”

With 4 average-sized bananas in a pound, the Masonic “Banana Men” deliver 16,640 bananas a year to patients at the North Chicago VA Medical Center. That equates to nearly 233,000 bananas since the program’s inception.

“My hope is that they remember that we care,” said Vanderhoef of the patients at the medical center. “We are not recruiting. We’re really just a service organization that wants to remind our Veterans that we care. If, at the end of the day, just one Veteran knows that we care, we’ve succeeded.”

Red Rover Medical Clinic Competes to Shed the Most Weight

Some do it to keep up with their children. Some are motivated with the idea of fitting back into their favorite pair of jeans. Some even do it because their loved ones are counting on them. Whatever their reasons, the sailors and civilians of Red Rover Branch Health Clinic are competing to shed the most combined weight during their “1523 Slim Down” competition.

“The last time we did this, the teams lost more than 200 combined pounds,” said Capt. Debra Pennington, Red Rover Branch Health Clinic Department Head. “Like the last time, they group in teams of at least 3 people, and keep each other accountable. People just seem more motivated and inclined to compete when it’s a team effort.”

Pennington noted that there are 12 teams competing this year, totaling 37 people. In the end, they hope to lose more than 220 pounds -- but each seems to have a unique reason to lose the weight.

“I want to be able to play with my 1-year-old daughter, Ava,” said Anthony Pressely, Red Rover Branch Health Clinic Medical Records Technician, as he lifted weights in the new “Fit Pit” within the clinic. “I’m a fairly new ‘fat guy.’ I had a back injury a couple of years back and put on a little weight since then. I’m really just tired of being fat.”

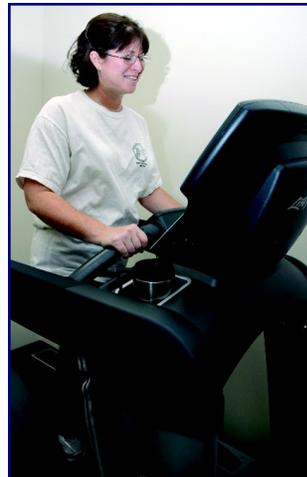


Also lifting weights with Pressely was HM1 Nick Piccard, Red Rover Branch Health Clinic Lead Petty Officer. Piccard noted that he wants to lose 20 pounds, but sees this as a normal part of his annual routine.

“For me, this is just a way of staying trim, plus I have a pretty strong competitive nature,” said Piccard. “This is my annual routine. Every year I put on the weight, and every year I take it off.”

The 8-week program requires each member to complete all weigh-ins and attend both exercise and nutrition classes. Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Andy Archila, Red Rover Branch Health Clinic Optometry Division Officer, sees this competition as much more than a single event, but an opportunity to set the year off right and build healthy, lifelong habits.

“For our sailors, I think at least part of this has to do with preparing for our Physical Readiness Tests,” said Archila. “But we’re really taking a holistic approach to this competition, tapping into the knowledge of the Command Fitness Coordinator. They’re teach us about both weight loss and nutrition. It’s really a motivator for us, as the speakers are both knowledgeable and inspirational.”



Motivation was also a key factor for Lt. Cmdr. Theresa Everest, Red Rover Branch Health Clinic, Female Wellness Clinic Division Officer, who candidly explained that she was losing weight to care for her husband, who was recently diagnosed with cancer.

“He’s the most courageous person I know,” said Everest. “My husband is my motivation, and this program helps me to stay strong for him. Working out also helps me to maintain a peace-of-mind and gives me energy through my day.”



Illinois Tollway Signs in Place for Nation's First Federal Healthcare Center



Capt. James A. Lovell, Apollo 13 astronaut and retired naval officer, was on hand Mar. 3 with Patrick L. Sullivan, North Chicago VA Medical Center Director, and employees of Illinois Tollway to commemorate the placement of new tollway signs in honor of Lovell.

The large directional signs are placed in both directions of the I-94 Illinois Tollway at IL-137 (Buckley Rd.). The signs direct drivers to the "Cap-tain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center," which is the first federal health care center in the nation.

"I'm honored and humbled to have the new health care center named after me," said Lovell. "It's amazing to see the signs going up, and I'm very excited just to be part of this first-of-its kind initiative."

Lovell and Sullivan took commemorative photos with the signs at the Lake Forest Oasis, just prior to the Illinois Tollway erecting the signs at their final destination.

"It's a privilege to honor an American hero like Capt. Lovell," said Sullivan. "Seeing the tollway signs being put into place is another reminder that our Integration is moving forward and that the new face of federal health care will soon be part of our landscape."

Tomah

VA Veteran From Tomah Appears on Cover of "TIME" Magazine



Eight months into his tour, Chet Millard from Cataract, Wisconsin was lying on a stretcher in the Tangi Valley in Afghanistan waiting for a helicopter. A photographer embedded with a nearby infantry company took a photo of him. That photo ended up on the cover of the October 2009 issue of *Time* magazine.

"I was lying there," said Chet, "and this photographer was hovering over me with a camera. He asked if he could take my picture. I said, what for. He said, maybe *Time* magazine. I said, yea right." An hour or so before the photo, Millard was leading a platoon-size element (30 men and 8-12 vehicles) from the 951st Sapper Company out of Rhinelander and Tomahawk, WI on a supply mission to beef up a combat operations base (COB).

During their 10-month stay in Afghanistan, the Sappers primary mission was to clear supply routes of roadside bombs. The convoy was traveling down a narrow, winding road surrounded by mountainous terrain on either side. One of the vehicles was hit by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) on the way into the COB. After taking care of the wounded and recovering the vehicle, Millard's unit continued the mission. "We dropped off our cargo, turned around and started heading back down the same road," said Chet.

Even though they had cleared that road earlier, it was no longer safe. They would have to clear it again. "The insurgents are very good at what they do," said Chet. "Once you lose sight with a stretch of road, it is compromised. They can set up an IED in a matter of minutes."

Heading back toward their FOB or Forward Operating Base, the two lead vehicles in the convoy came around a tight curve without incident. The third vehicle, a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle, following 50 meters behind was suddenly thrust into the air catching the brunt of an IED.

"I don't know why they chose my vehicle," said Chet. "Maybe it was because I had the camera." The blast from the IED was so powerful it hurled the 19-ton MRAP into the side of the mountain.

"We fell right back into the hole," said Chet. "The explosion blew off the whole front end of the vehicle. The mine roller, engine block, everything." After re-gaining his senses, Millard immediately went into survival mode. His driver and gunner were both injured. The vehicle's radio was destroyed so Millard turned on a radio he carried. That radio was "blowing up" Millard remembers. Other vehicles in the convoy were frantically trying to establish contact with his destroyed vehicle.

"That's when the training kicks in," said Chet. "The infantry unit we just left went out and swept the area for any insurgents, but whoever it was just blended in and was gone. They found the detonating device that blew up my vehicle about 800 meters away." Insurgents use a variety of devices such as pressure plated bombs, cell phone adaptive bombs and common wire detonated bombs to blow up American vehicles. Sometimes a bomb can sit underneath a road for six months or more before an insurgent decides there is an opportunity to kill American soldiers.

"That's most of the pressure," he said. "You never know with this type of warfare." "When a unit leaves the security of a FOB, they also never really know when they're coming back. "Some missions you think are going to be 4 hours long and they turn into 4 days," said Chet. "One mission we went on was a 4 day mission and we stayed out for 27 days." In November 2009, the 951st Sapper Company returned home after supporting road clearing missions for the 101st Airborne, 82nd Airborne, 10th Mountain Division and the 25th Infantry Division. Soon after Chet Millard turned to the Tomah VA for help with some post-deployment health issues.

"I was not real happy with the VA the first time around," said Chet after seeking help from the VA following his first deployment to Iraq in 2003-04. "I could never get to the right person. I finally gave up."

This time around, he is much happier with the support he's getting from the VA. "It's a completely different system," he said. "Things have smoothed out a lot." Chet has been seeing providers at the Tomah VA since his return for PTSD, TBI and some other physical injuries due to the experiences he had in combat while deployed in Afghanistan. Despite these injuries, he still sees himself as a Soldier first and will assume another leadership role with another unit.

"I never thought I would be a PTSD sufferer," said Chet. "I don't know how it started, but one night at home I woke up pouring sweat. Then it happened again, this time my wife was watching me as I lie in bed. She said I was calling out to other Soldiers, barking out orders. I went to the VA to get help."

In his new military assignment, Millard hopes to encourage younger Soldiers to get help if they need it. "There's still that whole sign of weakness thing about getting help, but it's really not," he said. "I have a responsibility for other Soldier's lives, just like in combat. As leaders, we have to make split second decisions. We cannot let our fears control us. One part of you asks, 'Do we want to go down that road-NO, but another part says, 'Do we have to go down that road to support the mission-YES!'"

VA Supports 32nd Infantry Brigade Demobilization



As the approximately 3,200 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers who deployed with the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team return from Iraq in January, one mission remained – and a team of state and federal agencies were there to give Soldiers the tools they needed to complete that mission.

To ensure success, the Wisconsin Service Member Support Division (SMSD) joined forces with the state Department of Workforce Development and the state Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Tomah and Madison VA Medical Centers to help returning Soldiers and Airmen understand what rights and benefits they have earned as Veterans – in particular, education, employment and health care, and the opportunity to file service-related Veterans Affairs disability claims before leaving active duty.

AW2 Advocate Supports Severely Wounded, Ill, and Injured Soldiers, Veterans, and Their Families



Wendy Burdick, as a representative of the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2), began providing personalized assistance to severely wounded soldiers, Veterans, and their families, at the Tomah VA

Medical Center on January 11. AW2 is the official Army program that serves the most severely wounded, ill, and injured soldiers from Overseas Contingency Operations since 9/11. AW2 assists and advocates for more than 5,800 severely wounded soldiers, Veterans, and their families, wherever they are located, regardless of military status, for as long as it takes.

All AW2 soldiers are assigned a local AW2 Advocate who provides them ongoing personalized assistance, for as long as it takes. AW2 Advocates are located throughout the country and work with AW2 soldiers, Veterans, and their families from their time of injury, through recovery and transition, to life post-injury—whether that is back into service or into civilian life.

AW2 Advocates assist AW2 soldiers, Veterans, and their families with whatever their needs, including ensuring that they receive the appropriate benefits and entitlements, have access to local resources and understand all of their career and education options.

To qualify for the Army Wounded Warrior Program, a soldier must have or be expected to receive an Army disability rating of 30% or greater in one or more specific categories or a combined rating of 50% or greater for conditions that are the result of combat or are combat related.

Physical Therapist Participate in Vehicle Rollover Training on Fort McCoy



Three physical therapists from the Tomah VA Medical Center (VAMC) Polytrauma team (Kris

Valest, Shannon Utesch and Kelly Joyce) participated in vehicle rollover training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin on Thursday, February 4, 2010.

The purpose of the training for the Polytrauma team was to better understand the physical forces placed on the body during a vehicle rollover. Similar to learning methods used by physical therapists, athletic trainers and strength coaches in sports medicine, the vehicle rollover training will help the Polytrauma team to understand the bio-mechanics of human movement. Physical demands placed on soldiers may exceed those of athletes, therefore, participating in the training and applying the principles of sports medicine assisted the physical therapists to:

- Better understand the unique mechanism of injury.
- Strengthen the bond between Veteran/soldier and rehabilitation professional.
- Identify and develop an individual, high quality treatment plan specific to the unique injuries incurred from a vehicle rollover incident.

“This was some very unique training for us,” said Kris Valest, Preventive Medicine and Rehabilitation Services Supervisor at the Tomah VA. “The more we understand the nature of a soldier’s injuries, the quicker we can devise a treatment plan.”

87th Annual Snowflake Ski Jump



As the 2010 Winter Olympics began in Vancouver, ten Veterans from the Tomah VA Medical Center found out exactly what it felt like to be at an Olympic style event. They attended the 87th Annual Snowflake Ski Jump held on February 6th in Westby, WI. The

event played host to world-class ski jumpers from Norway, Russia, Poland, Finland and the United States. Many Olympic hopefuls have competed in previous years at the Snowflake Ski Jumping Complex. The ski jump complex at Snowflake consists of five jumps. The largest is a 118 meter Olympic-sized hill used for national and international competitions.

This year colder temperatures forced some Veterans to watch some of the jumps from the bus which was parked at the bottom of the hill. Others Veterans endured the cold with blankets and cups of coffee. “This was the first time I’ve been back since I was 16 years old when I jumped off the short jump,” said Korean and Vietnam War Veteran Roger Lewison. “I had a wonderful time here.”

Veterans enjoyed guessing the distances of each jump and ringing cow bells to cheer each jumper on. All Veterans and their spouses were admitted free to the event thanks to a donation from Logistic Health in La Crosse which provided a commemorative button specifically for the Veterans.

“Veterans are very special people,” said Don Weber, CEO of Logistic Health. “It’s just part of the culture of our company to give back.” Weber, a Marine who served in Vietnam, has been very involved in Veterans causes donating \$1 million dollars to the Veterans

Memorial Sports Complex Hall of Honor at UW-Lacrosse, establishing a scholarship fund named for his father for Veterans attending Wisconsin state colleges and LZ Lambeau, a two-day official welcome back for Vietnam-era Veterans at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin on May 21-23.

Renewal of Vows for a Marine and His Wife



In recent years, Marine Leonard Jasinski began suffering from the debilitating effects of Alzheimer’s disease. His memory was fading. When his wife, Arlene, came to visit him, he would sometimes forget they were married. Although they have been married 37 years, he would ask me, ‘When are we getting married?’ said Arlene. “So finally one day, I proposed to him and with the help of some of the staff we picked a day.” That day of renewal and commitment was on Tuesday, February 23, 2010 in the VA Chapel.

DAV Volunteer Logs 100,000 Miles for Veterans

Jim Cornell says he was shocked when he was presented with a 100,000 mile pin from the staff at the Tomah, Wisconsin VA Medical Center. He plans to add it to the numerous other award pins on his much decorated cap. A cap which commemorates the thousands of miles he has driven and hours he has volunteered to “get Veterans where they need to go.”

Every Monday since 1991, the 67-year-old former steel worker has transported eight or nine Veterans on the two hour drive from the Tomah center to the Madison, Wisconsin, VA Medical Center. Because he was too young for Korea and family situations kept him from Vietnam, Jim has always felt a need to pay back the men and women who did go.

Not one to waste spare time, while Jim is waiting for the Veterans to complete their appointments at Madison, he volunteers at the Information Desk, directing Veterans and their families to the different offices in the medical center. Which gives him a unique perspective on how patients and relatives feel about VA services: "People come up to me and ask who they talk to when they want to thank someone for the great care they received."



DAV Volunteer Jim Cornell assists Veteran Leo Wiley into the DAV van for a trip to the Madison VA

From his own personal, unscientific survey, Jim estimates that 95% of the Veterans he transports every week are very happy with the treatment they receive at VA hospitals.

A familiar figure at both VA locations, Jim is regularly recognized by many of the Veterans he has come to know in his 19 years of volunteering. At 6'1¼ and a wiry 140 pounds with a distinctive long gray beard, Jim has also been seen performing random acts of kindness and honesty. When he found \$200 on a hospital floor, he turned it in, admitting that, actually, he could have used it, "but I thought the guy that lost it probably needed it a lot more than me."

Jim brings a serious level of authority to his driving duties. "I don't let the folks talk to me when I'm driving. I have a lot of responsibility driving on the freeway with a van load of American Veterans."

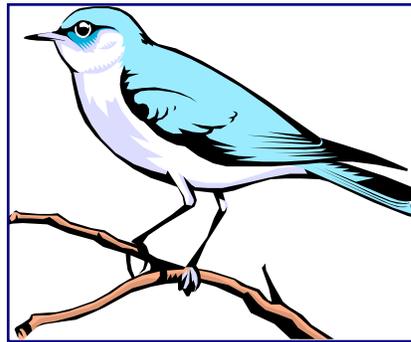
It's a family affair at the Tomah VA Medical Center for the Cornells. When anyone can't locate Jim, they can always ask his son, Jeff, who works in the engineering department at the hospital or his granddaughter, Jennifer, who is training to be a nurse there.

A part-time painter of the surreal school (Dali is his favorite artist) and deer hunter, Jim came to volunteering in his search for an old fashioned American ethic, people helping people. "You know, that's what made America great and I think we've lost some of that." "When people ask me why I do this if I don't get paid, I tell them I get paid a lot more than they will ever realize."

James Theres, public affairs officer at the Tomah VAMC, added that the staff at the medical center would not be able to do what they do without the help of the volunteers. "We have 360 volunteers and 992 employees. They make up one-third of our work force. People like Jim Cornell make all the difference in providing the care our Veterans deserve."

For people who may be thinking about volunteering, Jim quickly replies, "Give it a chance. It's great for our Veterans. And it will make you feel good."

Bluebird Trail Coming to Tomah VA



The Tomah VA Medical Center became the home of a 35-box blue bird trail this spring. The trail will be created under the direction of Dr. Kent Hall, retired professor of Biology from

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Dr. Hall presented a public lecture "Learning to Think Like a Bluebird" on March 13 on the Tomah VA campus.

Known in many parts of Wisconsin as "Dr. Bluebird," Dr. Hall coordinates the largest bluebird trail in Wisconsin which has produced just over 19,000 bluebirds in the last eight years. For the 2010 season, this bluebird trail will have 1,250 nest boxes monitored by 60 people and is expected to produce 6,000 bluebirds.

Dr. Hall is Vice-President and Coordinator of Data Collection for the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin. Four years ago he started a program, "Operation Top State," in an effort to have the state of Wisconsin produce the most bluebirds in the country. Under his guidance, Wisconsin has led all states in bluebird production for the last three years.

Monroe County is the third most productive county for bluebirds in Wisconsin. Dr. Hall will emphasize how to attract bluebirds to your yard and how to become a monitor for one of the many bluebird trails in the Tomah/Monroe County area, including the new trail at the Tomah VA. Bluebird monitors will be there to discuss their experiences, as well.

64th Annual BVL Veterans Bowling



Tomah VA Veterans Cy Gloss and Chuck Oness compete as teammates in the wheelchair division at the Tomah VA Medical Center's bowling alley

The 64th Annual BVL Veterans Bowling Tournament kicked off on Monday, March 1st and ran through March 26th.

There were nine different categories Veterans could participate in and they competed against bowlers from more than 100 hospitals around the country.

The tournament began in 1946 when the first WWII Veterans returned from the battlefields of Europe.

VA Police Department Joins WI Internet Crime Against Children Task Force

The Tomah Veterans Affairs Police Department has joined the Wisconsin Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. "We are pleased to have the Tomah VA Police Department as a member of the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force and pledge our full support as we work together to make Wisconsin safer for our children," said Wisconsin Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen. As part of this affiliation, the Tomah Veterans Affairs Police Department is eligible for:

- Reimbursement to help fund ICAC related expenses, including computer hardware and software;
- Notification of and priority for sought-after ICAC related training, offered both nationally and in Wisconsin;
- Investigative assistance from highly trained ICAC investigators and forensic computer analysts throughout the state;
- Access to the national ICAC email group; Recognition on both the Sawyer County Sheriff Office's website, and on the Wisconsin Department of Justice website;

This year marks the 11th anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Department of Justice Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. There are over 22,304 internet protocol addresses in Wisconsin containing and offering to distribute known images of child pornography. One in seven children are asked online to engage in sexual activities, sexual talk, or provide personal sexual information. In addition to expanding investigative capacity internally, the Wisconsin Department of Justice has continued to add additional local affiliates to the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force. The number of local law enforcement partners added to the Department of Justice's ICAC Task Force has increased by more than five times to 133 since 2006.

"This is definitely a program that the Tomah Veterans Affairs Police Department will embrace in order to protect the best interest of our children," said Chief Roberto Obong.

Awards and Recognition

Seven **Hines VAH** physicians were honored to be included on this year's *Chicago Magazine* list of Chicago's Best Doctors. Congratulations to **Michael Bednar**, Orthopedics Hand Surgery, **Joseph Clark**, Oncology, **Patrick Fahey**, Pulmonary, **Martin Tobin**, Pulmonary, **Bahman Emami**, Radiation Oncology, **Elaine Adams**, Rheumatology and **Howard Greisler**, Vascular Surgery. Each of the doctors was nominated for the list by his or her Chicago-area physician colleagues. The list appears in the 2010 issue of *Chicago Magazine*.

Eileen Collins, R.N., Ph.D. who directs the Physical Performance Laboratory at Hines was recently awarded with a Research Career Scientist (RCS) Award. The RCS program is a highly selective program designed to sustain and enhance the research careers of established non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated commitment to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rehabilitation research. The RCS Award is for nationally recognized VA scientists who have made significant contributions to research and development. This is a momentous achievement in the VA research community.

Congratulations to Hines Researcher **Kathryn Jones, PhD**, who also received the Research Career Scientist Award from V Biomedical Laboratory Research & Development Service. The focus of her research is exploring the neurotherapeutic application of gonadal steroid hormones and electrical stimulation in both peripheral nerve damage and spinal cord injury, and in improving rehabilitative outcomes after neural injury. She is also studying the role of the immune system in responding to neural injury and providing neuroprotectin to damaged motor neurons. From this work, VA researchers are beginning to address underlying mechanisms in ALS, a fatal motor neuron disease, and are developing stem cell therapy toward treatment of that disease as well as application in neural repair after traumatic injury.

Hines VAH received the 2009 RCA Cornerstone Silver Award from the VA National Center for Patient Safety. This prestigious award recognizes the facility for fostering a spirit of patient safety in the facility and meeting specific quality, timeliness and quantity criteria related to patient safety.

Jesse Brown VAMC was a recipient of the Illinois 2009 Governor's Sustainability Award for "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The award was personally presented to JBVAMC by Governor Quinn at the medical center on December 22. He was accompanied by Dan Grant, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs.



Governor Pat Quinn (middle) personally presented the Governor's Award for Sustainability to JBVAMC. He is joined here by (from left) Dan Grant, Director, IL Department of Veterans Affairs; Joe Bazil, Assistant Chief, JBVAMC Environmental Management Service; Michelle Blakely, JBVAMC Associate Director and Derrick Morrison, GEMS Coordinator for JBVAMC

The medical center is serious about its efforts to sustain the environment. In just one year's time, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center recycles 170 tons of cardboard and paper, saves over 1.4 million KWh of electrical energy and almost 2.5 million gallons of water, keeps over 100 tons of pollutants from entering the atmosphere, avoids sending over 1,000 cubic yards of waste to a landfill and recycles over 60,000 gallons of food grease.

JBVAMC's bed tower is also one of the "greenest" in the nation, using recycled materials for woodwork and flooring, sky lights and thermal windows for temperature control and a green roof that controls storm water run-off and returns oxygen to the atmosphere.



Madison VAH has achieved Magnet recognition for excellence in nursing services by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet Recognition Program. This is one of the highest

levels of recognition a hospital can achieve. The notification was received in January following a unanimous vote by the Commission on Magnet. Becky Kordahl, Nurse Executive, received the notification conference call with Deborah Thompson, Director, and other staff members in attendance.

"We are honored to receive Magnet recognition," said Kordahl. "This is tangible evidence that our organization is achieving excellent outcomes on behalf of the Veterans we serve. Abraham Lincoln made a promise that our nation would provide care for those who have served, and our hospital and clinics are fulfilling that promise in an exemplary manner."

Madison VAH's commitment to achieve Magnet recognition was made by Nursing Service in 2005. A tremendous amount of work went into achieving this status not only in the many hours that were spent by a dedicated staff to compile the 14 volume Magnet document, but also the effort and time of all the Madison VAH staff in achieving the excellent outcomes that are a primary factor in Magnet status.

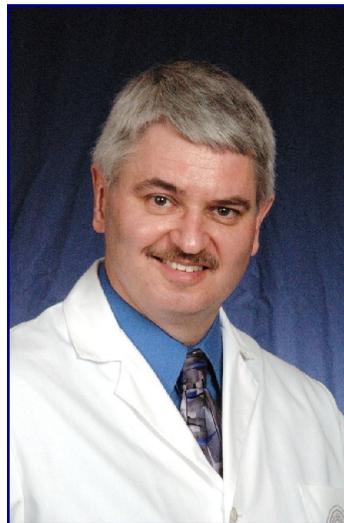
Magnet recognition is bestowed upon health care organizations that provide quality patient care, nursing excellence and innovations in professional nursing practice. Applicants undergo a rigorous evaluation that includes extensive documentation of outcomes and facility staff interviews. Research shows there are clear benefits to health care organizations that achieve Magnet status and to the communities they serve:

- Health care consumers have more confidence in the overall quality of a hospital.
- Facilities achieving Magnet status consistently outperform other facilities in recruiting and retaining nurses.

- Magnet status becomes an attractive force that extends to the entire facility for recruiting higher caliber staff.

Madison VAH is in a select group being one of only five VA facilities to have achieved Magnet status. It is valid for four years.

Four key members of the Madison VAH staff have been appointed to national VA committees: **Dr. Alan Bridges**, Chief of Staff, was appointed to the National Chief of Staff Advisory Committee; **Becky Kordahl**, Nurse Executive, was appointed to the National Nurse Executive Council (NNEC); **Ila Minnick**, Chief of Perioperative and Emergency Services, has been appointed to the Integrated Productivity Team for National Scope Standardization Program; and **Karen Anderson**, Nurse Manager, has been selected to serve as a member of the VA Central Office Nurse Professional Standards Board. This board is an important part of the nursing peer review process. These appointments reflect a strong vote of confidence in these staff members based on their accomplishments and expertise.



Because of his expertise on the history of neurological technologies, and on the reflex hammers in particular, **Douglas Lanska**, MD, FAAN was consulted in the re-design of the Taylor reflex hammer which was designed by John Madison Taylor in 1888. The Taylor hammer was the first tool designed to elicit reflexes and had a distinct American design. According to Dr. Lanska, "most Taylor

hammers currently available are underweighted and too short...and are cheaply made models often distributed by pharmaceutical companies as promotional items." Changes to the new Taylor hammer include: a much heavier head, soft, but not spongy, rubber striking surfaces and an extension of the shaft which is constructed using high-quality steel.

The new hammer weighs approximately 180 grams. "I hope neurologists and other neurologically-oriented clinicians will find this new model of the Taylor hammer to be both convenient and useful in performing neurologic examination," said Dr. Lanska.

The **Tomah VA Medical Center** was selected as one of twenty sites within the Veterans Health Administration to receive a grant for systems redesign and improvement. The \$1.3 million dollar grant was awarded to the Intensive Clinical Care Management (ICCM) team consisting of Nurse Practitioner, Peggy Dwyer, RN Care Manager, Linda Martens, Registered Dietitian, Faye Moseley-Rezin, CDE and Medical Center Director, Jerald D. Molnar. The funding will be dispersed during FY 2010-2012.

ICCM is a chronic disease management program designed for individuals who are unable to achieve or maintain safe levels of control of their chronic disease(s) and as a result are at greater risk of complications. The program utilizes frequent telephone, individual and shared medical appointments to meet the needs of these patients. A pilot program, ICCM Diabetes, was launched in October 2008 at the Tomah VAMC and has demonstrated promising patient outcomes throughout 2009 including high scores in patient satisfaction. Based on these results, the Tomah VAMC was selected to receive funding to expand this program as part of a system redesign and improvement.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for the ICCM team. We are honored to have received this grant and are determined to use the money to further develop a program we believe can make a difference in the lives of many Veterans and make it available throughout our catchment area," said Nurse Practitioner, Peggy Dwyer.

Efforts are now focused on expanding services at the Tomah VAMC during 2010 and offering outreach services by late 2010. Plans include a mobile unit that will allow the ICCM team to bring services to Veterans living in outlying areas who utilize the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Lacrosse, Loyal, Wausau and Wisconsin Rapids.

National Salute to Veterans National Salute to Veterans

VA's across the Network celebrated "National Salute to Veterans Week."

Jesse Brown VAMC and **Hines VA Hospital** Voluntary Services co-sponsored a free "Valentines for Veterans" concert at Chicago's Auditorium Theatre on Saturday night, February 6, featuring the popular Chicago-based R&B vocal group The Chi-Lites. A packed crowd of approximately 3,200 veterans, Gold Star family members and guests attended.

The Chi-Lites are a Chicago-based soul group that racked up 11 Top 10 U.S. rhythm and blues singles during the 1970's, ranging from the romantic ballads "Have You Seen Her" and "Oh Girl" to protest songs like "(For God's Sake) Give More Power to the People."

The program began at 7 p.m. with Willie (Casper) Perry serving as Master of Ceremonies. The popular entertainer is best known as the originator of the Electric Slide dance and DJ work at WVAZ-FM in Chicago. The National Anthem was performed on harmonica by JBVAMC employee Alejandro Cuevas, with the JBVAMC Police Service Honor Guard's



Presentation of Colors as a backdrop. JBVAMC employee Alejandro Cuevas performed the National Anthem to open the concert

Prior to the concert, VA's Assistant Secretary for Public & Intergovernmental Affairs, L. Tammy Duckworth gave a keynote address. A special tribute was also provided to the Gold Star families present who had lost a son or daughter in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The Chi-Lites came on stage at approximately 8:00 and played for about 1 ½ hours. At the conclusion of the concert, the group invited a large number of Veterans and VA volunteers to join them on stage for the final song.

The event was part of the nationwide “Valentines for Veterans” concert series that began in 2007 and is sponsored through VA Voluntary Service and the Help Hospitalized Veterans service organization. The medical centers also used the concert as an opportunity for Veterans and their guests to become VA volunteers and were successful in signing up over 50 people.



The Chi-Lites performed in front of a packed crowd of Chicago Veterans

“Taking part in this event was truly an honor,” said Sharon M. Helman, Hines Director. “In the short time that I have been here, it has already become evident to me that the VA staff in Chicago is extremely committed to Veterans. The Chi-Lites concert gave me the opportunity to witness the strong support that the Chicago community at large gives its Veterans. It was a very special night.”

Jesse Brown VAMC Director James S. Jones recalled from his tour of duty in Vietnam that “music helped to relieve the stress and anxieties of serving in a combat zone 8,000 miles from home. It had the power to transport us away from the dangers and unknowns all the way back to our homes. Music still plays a powerful role in the therapy VA provides to its patients.”

JBVAMC and Hines VAH hope to sponsor additional “Valentines for Veterans” concerts in the upcoming years.

High school students from New Trier Township High School paired off with military Veterans from the **North Chicago VA Medical Center** to conduct interviews and discuss experiences as part of their Service Learning Project during the National Salute to Veterans Week.

The sophomore students arrived at the medical center prepared with questions and a desire to learn first-hand accounts of life in the military, explained teachers Ariell Bachman and Trisha Randall.



“This is an amazing experience for students to see beyond the walls of the high school and speak with people who have overcome great obstacles and challenges,” said Randall.

(From left) New Trier Township High School sophomores Joe Coan and Dan Duffy listen to U.S. Army Veteran Jason Pennington about his experiences in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 10th-grade students were at the medical center as part of their Service Learning Project during the National Salute to Veterans Week.

U.S. Army Veteran Jason Pennington, of Waukegan, Ill., spoke with 10th graders Dan Duffy and Joe Coan of his time as a company commander during Operation Iraqi Freedom. “The entire thing was an amazing experience,” said Pennington of his service. “But I’d go back again in a heartbeat.”

Sophomore student Brooklyn Czuma listened closely to U.S. Army Veteran Martin Johnson's account of his most frightening experience in the military, but like Pennington, Johnson too said he would return to the service of his country, if his age allowed him to do so.



(From left) U.S. Army Veteran Martin Johnson speaks with New Trier Township High School sophomores Brooklyn Czuma and David Yoon about their service learning project during the National Salute to Veterans Week

"It's so important to hear first-hand accounts of war and being in the Army," said Czuma. "It gives us more of a feel of what it was like to be there, which is so different than what you see on television."

Bachman explained how she was impressed with how many of the students were sharing personal experiences and challenges with the Veterans. "I suppose this environment creates a 'no-judgment zone' for them, giving the students the comfort to open up in ways that they may not be able to in a classroom or at home," she said. "Once the dialogue starts, it's amazing how they seem to find a connection between common experiences."

Madison VAH conducted their annual National Salute to Veterans celebration primarily on Sunday, February 14th.

All inpatients received a monetary gift (\$10 bills) from the VA Voluntary Service Committee. An ice cream social as well as bedside visitations from volunteers were also part of the celebration.

Every year the hospital receives an abundance of valentines, this year nearly 5,000, from area service, school, church and other community groups.

Every valentine is counted and screened by the volunteers to ensure they are appropriate for distribution to the patients. Valentines are handed out to inpatients by the volunteers and on meal trays.

Outpatients also receive valentines in with their appointment reminder letters and with their prescriptions. Many of the valentines are sent in from school children and include handwritten sentiments.



Patient Ronald Grossman of Lake Mills, Wis., and members of his family receive frozen treats at the bedside from volunteers as part of the ice cream social

There are always many that stand out and are particularly meaningful such as the following: "Dear Veteran, Thank you for everything you do. You probably hear this a lot, or maybe you don't, but you are one of the most important people in the United States. If we didn't have you, this wouldn't be a free country. Even if you didn't go to war, you still helped our country. So, I just wanted to say, "Thank you." You are a real inspiration to our country so, again, thank you."

VA nationally celebrates the National Salute to Veterans every year during the week of Valentine's Day. The event was established in 1974 and is held to honor Veterans and to increase community awareness of VA's role in providing comprehensive medical care to the Nation's Veterans.

From bowling tournaments to guest performers, a caricaturist to a three-day arts and crafts festival, the **Tomah VA** lined up some pretty extraordinary events for Veterans during National Salute to Veteran Patients week.

This year's arts and crafts show brought in a record number of entries (116) from a record number of entrants (71) in thirty-eight different categories. All first place winners in each category have now moved on to regional competition. A first place or Gold Medal finish there and it's on to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival which the Tomah VA will host in October 18-25, 2010.

Veteran Harry Lutz below proudly displays his drawing by Caricaturist Tommy Orrico.



Vietnam Veteran Lem Genovese performs for fellow Veterans in the "Spirit of Freedom" dining hall



Miss Wisconsin, Katrina Smaby presents Tomah VA Veteran Scott Showers (center) with the People's Choice Award for his monochromatic drawing entitled "Hands of Time on My Hands" during the National Salute Week Arts and Crafts Award Show on February 26.

Also pictured l to r: Medical Center Director Jerald D. Molnar, American Legion Auxilliary representative Pat Flanders and Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) representative Glenda Busby

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