The Great Lakes News

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Secretary of Veterans Affairs Visits Milwaukee

The Veterans Affairs top boss, Eric K. Shinseki, made a whirlwind visit of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Regional Office and Cemetery last month.

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Shinseki, a retired Army four-star general and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, was in town at the end of August to speak at the American Legion national convention.

He told Legionnaires he was glad to be in Milwaukee, and proud to work with the Veterans' organization to bring meaningful change.

"Over the years, VA and the Legion have collaborated to serve Veterans. It is my opinion that the relationship has never been stronger, more trusting or more productive," he told the crowd at the Frontier Airlines Convention Center. "Now, that's not accidental. Nor is it the result of just personal chemistry. It takes a concerted effort – hard work – on both of our parts, to address the challenges facing Veterans, especially during this period of extended economic difficulty."

Shinseki said there's been a $25 billion increase over the last two years, which underscores the commitment to transforming the VA and fixing problems that have plagued the department for decades.

Some of those changes include:

- The new Post-9/11 GI Bill, the largest student aid package of its kind since the original bill in 1944.
- A widening of benefits for those affected by Agent Orange in Vietnam. Parkinson's disease, hairy cell and other chronic b-cell leukemias and ischemic heart disease have been added to the list of illnesses and diseases, bringing the total number of Agent Orange presumptions to 15.
- Simplified claims processing for Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.
- $4.5 billion for mental health programs and another 1,000 mental health professionals hired across the nation since 2009.

He also stressed his ongoing goal to eliminate Veteran homelessness. "If you wonder what this Secretary will be working on for the next several years, this is it," he said. "Over the past six years, we have reduced Veteran homelessness by nearly 90,000. We will end Veteran homelessness in the next five years."

Following his speech, Shinseki stopped by the VA campus to have a working lunch with senior leadership, then toured the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic with Dr. Ken Lee, the division manager. He also stopped at the regional office to hear about new benefit initiatives and posed for photos with employees from the cemetery.

While touring the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic, Shinseki chatted with several patients, including Gus Sorenson, a paralyzed Veteran who regularly participates in the VA's Wheelchair Games.

Shinseki pointed out the window of the dayroom at Miller Park and asked if anyone was a baseball fan. Oh yeah," Sorenson said. "We've been to a few games. The Brewers take good care of us." "I'm a Red Sox fan myself," Shinseki said. "When I check the scores in the morning, as long as the Yankees lose, that's OK with me."

"I told him I'm a Cubs fan, so I feel his pain," Sorenson said.

Network News

Hines

New VA Clinic Location Coming Soon in LaSalle County

Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital will be opening a new 9,600 square foot Veterans clinic location in LaSalle this fall. The new location, which is only a few miles from and three times the size of the current clinic location in LaSalle, will offer Veterans new and expanded services in a modern environment with state-of-the-art medical equipment.

Some of the services offered in the new LaSalle Clinic location will include:

- Physical Therapy
- Geriatrics
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Audiology
- Expanded Mental Health
- Retinal Imaging
- MOVE! Program
- Diabetes Group
- My HealthEVet Learning Center
- Women's Health Care
- And more specialty services to come

"We are committed to providing our patients with top quality health care in a modern and professional environment," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "The new LaSalle Clinic will be so much larger and offer many more services."

Hines will be holding a special ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the new LaSalle Clinic location on Friday, October 8th at 11:00 a.m.

The new clinic will be located at 4461 North Progress Boulevard, Peru, Illinois 61354. The phone number of the LaSalle Clinic (815) 223-9678 will remain unchanged.

Communication Efforts

Communicating Hines events, news and successes to patients as well as staff is a top priority for the leadership. Several new communication initiatives are underway at the hospital to address this. Hines entered the world of social media in August by unrolling a new Hospital Facebook page. In one week, the hospital's Facebook page had more than 200 enthusiastic fans and touted facility events and news like the new Women's Health Center, the hospital's car show and positive stories in the media. The hospital will be promoting the new page to Veterans as way to obtain information about Hines and their programs.

The Hines Blind Center and one of its patients was featured in a very positive story in a recent Chicago Tribune article. The story is entitled "Hospital's blind -vets program gets younger clients Hines helps Veterans 'take back their lives'." To view the article go to: http://www.chicagotribune.com/health/ct-met-blind-vet-2010.

In addition, a Hines Volunteer wrote a very special article for his local newspaper on his experience at the Hospital. That story can be found at http://www.thereporteronline.net/atf.php?sid=21462&current_edition=2010-08-12.

Both of these stories were featured on the new Hines Facebook page, as well as the Hospital intranet and internet sites.

"We are very excited to be able to communicate with our staff and patients via Facebook," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "We are also going to use our blog and our Marlin flat screen TVs to get the word out about the great things going on at the facility."

To further engage employees in the hospital and new initiatives, the hospital's strategic planning committee has developed a new Hines mission statement, slogan, values and vision, and of course a new strategic plan that closely ties in to the national VHA strategic plan. Efforts are ongoing to educate employees on these important new items.

The hospital also has a new logo, designed by hospital Patient Administration employee Deborah Zajac.

HINES VA
serving with pride

Ms. Zajac designed two logos and employees were asked to vote for the hospital's new winning logo. The winning logo, an eagle, will be displayed on facility products and signage along with our new slogan "Serving with Pride".

"I think it is very important for our staff and patients to know what we stand for as an organization and all be working toward a common goal," said Director Helman. "We are really stepping up our communication efforts and have already had a very positive response from employees and patients."

Health Fair

Health screenings, giveaways and lots of great educational information were featured at the Hines Health Fair, held in early September in the Hospital Auditorium. More than 500 Veterans and employees attended the fair, which featured information on numerous VA and Hines initiatives, including the hospital MOVE! Program, Women's Health, Dental Health, My HealtheVet, and the new Patient Aligned Care Team initiative.

Dr. Shirene Nourbash was happy to explain the new Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) programs to Veterans attending the Hines Health Fair.

"We were so happy with the turnout at this year's fair," said Mandy Kalins, Hines Suicide Prevention Coordinator, who played a key role in organizing the fair. "It was great to see so many Veterans come down to get their blood pressure checked and learn about all we have to offer at our hospital."

Hines patient David Gerard attended the fair and was impressed with what he saw. "I only go to one clinic here at Hines, so I was pleasantly surprised to learn about many of the programs that are here for us. What a great idea.

Cindy Clifton, (right) from the Dental Clinic, demonstrated good dental hygiene techniques to a female Veteran attending the Hines Health Fair.

Car Show

The second annual Hines Car Show was a huge success. The show, which was coordinated by Voluntary Service and Thunder Road Productions, featured more than 100 cars, food, entertainment and lots of fun for the several hundred people in attendance this year.

Barry Klor (left), Chief of Audiology and Speech Pathology, was a one-man band, singing tunes from the 70s and 80s to car show participants. Hines outreach staff were also on hand and were able to sign many eligible Veterans up for care during the show. Hines inpatients from the hospital's Residential Care Facility spent hours outside on the beautiful day checking out all the vintage cars as well.

Proceeds from the Car Show, which total almost $20,000 will be donated to Hines.

A Visit From Navy Petty Officers

There was a sea of brown uniforms at Hines in early September when more than 100 Chief Petty Officers from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center visited the hospital for an afternoon. The sailors gathered in the Hospital auditorium for a welcome by Peter Dancy, the hospital's Associate Director, and then broke into small groups to go around the hospital to meet patients.

Mike McCrary, Chief of Hines Maintenance and Operations and a proud Navy Veteran himself, was one of a group of employees who volunteered to escort the Chiefs around the campus to patient care areas. "It was interesting meeting the Chiefs from the various backgrounds and escorting them around to meet and greet patients," he said. "I think exposing these future Veterans to our hospital and our patients was a great experience for them as well."

Chief Petty Officer Jeffrey Miller, who visited was among the group to visit patients in the Hines Community Living Center, agreed. "It was a lot of fun meeting the older Veterans and hearing their stories," he said. "I met a World War II Veteran during the visit. What a hero! I also got to hear one of the patient's play his trumpet. It was great."

Dr. Jack Bulmash (above), Acting Hines Chief of Staff, took a group of Petty Officers on a tour of the AMVETS Reactivation Center down in the Extended Care Center. Other Hines employees took groups to the Spinal Cord Injury Center, the Blind Center and the hospital's Residential Care Facility. Chicago ABC Channel 7 was on hand to film the visit.

Hines patient Clyde Curtain was overcome by emotion when meeting a group of the Chief Petty Officers. "The visit brought tears to my eyes," said Mr. Curtain. "These young folks came all the way out here to thank us for our service when we should be thanking them," he added.

"I was so impressed with the kindness and respect that these men and woman in uniform showed to our Veterans," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "They really brightened the day for our patients and our staff and we look forward to hosting them again in the future."

Iron Mountain

60th Anniversary

In recognition of the 60th Anniversary of the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center, photos of each Service were taken to honor and recognize the hard work and dedication of the staff and put into this photo collage.

New Family Lounge & New Mom Program

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center (OGJVAMC) has recently opened a new family lounge (above) on the third floor near the canteen.

The family lounge features a private restroom, changing station, children's activities, a television and ample seating. We are excited to offer families a private lounge to relax in during their visit to the medical center.

In 2009, the OGJ VAMC recorded 13 pregnancies for enrolled women Veterans and 5 deliveries. In 2010, it is anticipated that they will see 10 deliveries; a doubling from last year. This may seem like small numbers but in the VA it is a good example of the growing female Veteran population and the VA stepping in to provide health care to them.

At the OGJ VAMC, the idea to offer women Veterans, who were new mothers, was conceived in collaboration with Voluntary Service and the Women Veterans Healthcare Program. Many Veterans' service organizations came forward to donate hand-crocheted items and funds in order to help welcome women Veterans back into the VA, after delivery.

The OGJ VAMC wants women Veterans to know that we have not forgotten about them during their 9 months of receiving maternity care in the private sector. By providing a well-stocked diaper bag after delivery, we hope to relay the message that they are welcome here, we care about them and we want them to return to VA for their healthcare.

Pictured are new Mom, Sarah Murphy (right) and Women Veterans Program Manager, Julie Gendron handing over the first stocked diaper bag for the New Moms Program.

To Keep It Blue, You Gotta Go Green

The Iron Mountain Green Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) Committee hosted the third annual awareness fair celebrating the 39th Anniversary of Earth Day, the 137th observation of Arbor Day and National Recycling Week on June 22, 2010.

The GEMS Committee displayed educational booths on recycling issues, held contests for visitors, and had senior management vote on the entries for the recycling sculpture contest. This year's theme for the recycling sculpture contest was "To keep it blue, you gotta go green."

The team of Patrick and Kara Millan captured first place honors and the People's Choice award for their entry, "VA Bistro" (above) in the recycling sculpture contest. A special thanks was given to those who participated in the recycling sculpture contest and to the 167 people who attended this year's GEMS Fair.

Instructs Veterans in Fly Fishing

The Oscar G. Johnson VAMC Mental Health Services in conjunction with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing Inc. Program provided a seven session course to learn fly fishing. Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing Program is offered to active military personnel and VA Veterans at the DoD and DVA hospitals across the nation. The program provides basic fly fishing, fly casting, fly tying and rod building classes. Project Healing Waters provided one on one volunteer instructor for each participant and the equipment. The classes included instruction on fly fishing, bugs (caddis, mayfly, stoneflies) tying, and knots.

The Project's training and educational activities are designed to ignite or rekindle the participants' appreciation and enthusiasm for a wide variety of fly fishing outings. For many participants, particularly disabled Veterans, the socialization and camaraderie of the classes are just as important as the fishing outings and provide them a new activity.

Kirt King, LMSW, was the first of the hospital behavioral health providers to incorporate the Project Healing Waters Program into his weekly group of 19 participants.

They had classes in the early evening, practicing their casting on the medical center's lawn.

Kimberly Wallman, DO, stepped in for a couple of the sessions to help out and learn some of her own fly fishing skills. The final meeting was held at Bass Lake where everyone tried out their new skills. They had two boats to use so our disabled Veterans could participate as well.

Showing their enthusiasm and appreciation of the program, the Veteran's brought meals for everyone in the group including all the instructors for all seven classes. The food was scrumptious, weather was great, and the fish were swimming. The program was a huge success for the Veterans as well as for the instructors and therapists.

Jesse Brown

New Law Improves Veterans Access to VA Hospitals During Emergencies

Veterans receiving transportation from Emergency Management Service (EMS) paramedics in the State of Illinois may now request they be taken to Jesse Brown VAMC (JBVAMC) or any other nearby VA medical center, thanks to Senate Bill 3637, which was signed into law by Governor Pat Quinn on July 3rd.

And, especially, thanks to Dr. Chad Kessler, Director of JBVAMC's Emergency Department, who spearheaded efforts to amend the Illinois law that previously prohibited EMS personnel from transporting patients to VA facilities, since they were not part of the EMS system. Under the amendment, federal VA hospitals in Illinois will join the statewide EMS system and Veterans receiving transportation from that system can request to be taken to a VA hospital to receive emergency care.

Senate Bill 3637 was the direct result of an inquiry by Dr. Kessler following an incident approximately one year ago when a Veteran passed out at the bus stop on the corner of Damen and Taylor, in front of JBVAMC. A bystander called "911" and an EMS ambulance took the Veteran to another (non-VA) hospital, even though the Veteran asked to be taken to the Emergency Department at Jesse Brown VAMC. Dr. Kessler was upset that the Veteran could not be taken to JBVAMC as he desired. He asked Joe Bazil, JBVAMC Outreach Coordinator and Assistant Chief of Environmental Management Service, if he had any contacts that could be approached about amending the law.

Mr. Bazil contacted Alderman James Balcer, former Director of Veterans Services for the City of Chicago, for assistance. Alderman Balcer worked with Dr. Kessler and the City of Chicago's Legal Team to research the matter and then enlisted the aid of State Senator Antonio Munoz (D-Chicago), who ultimately co-sponsored the legislation with State Representative Michael McAuliffe (R-Chicago). The bill passed the Illinois General Assembly unanimously.

During the Bill Signing Ceremony on July 3, Dr. Chad Kessler, Director of JBVAMC's Emergency Department, spoke about his efforts to amend the law that prohibited Emergency Management Services in the State of Illinois from transporting Veterans to VA hospitals in the event of an emergency. Behind him is Governor Pat Quinn, who signed the bill into law.

At the Bill Signing Ceremony, held over the 4th of July weekend on the lawn of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dr. Kessler made a few remarks, followed by State Senator Munoz and Alderman Balcer. All were unanimous in praising VA health care and that the amendment would provide greater access to Veterans needing emergency care. Following their remarks, Governor Quinn signed the legislation and presented honorary pens from the signing to Dr. Kessler and Dr. Wendy Brown, JBVAMC's Acting Medical Center Director.

The new law goes into effect on January 1, 2011.

JB Employee is National Spokesman for Veterans Hiring Initiative

Three years ago, Martell Buckley was serving with the US Marine Corps infantry in Northern Iraq. Today, he is the national spokesperson and public face of a campaign initiated by President Obama to bring more Veterans into the federal workforce.

Following his discharge in 2008, the 29-year-old Veteran enrolled for care at Jesse Brown VAMC and worked with Valerie Creedon and Lela Vance-Glover of the OEF/OIF Team to sharpen his job hunting skills and prepare for interviews. Through the national Veterans Employment Coordination Service (VECS), he was hired by JBVAMC last year as a Customer Service Representative and stationed at the medical center's Information Desk.

Martell Buckley, (above) Information Receptionist GS-0304-04 (Department of Veterans Affairs)

After learning that VA Central Office (VACO) was looking for a Veteran who had received a job through VECS to promote a new Veterans hiring initiative, the medical center submitted Mr. Buckley's name for consideration.

"We thought he would be the perfect candidate," Valerie Creedon said. "He had come through the VECS program and was a very dedicated employee and especially dedicated towards assisting Veterans."

"I lost a lot of my buddies in Iraq," said Mr. Buckley, who himself was disabled by two IED blasts during his deployment, "and I liked the idea of a job where I could really make a difference in the lives of a lot of Veterans."

"I'm not sure how I was picked," he said, "but I received a phone call from VACO in November asking me to come to Washington to be the program's spokesperson. They scheduled a photo shoot for me in January."

Today, photos and other images of Martell are part of a national campaign that includes TV commercials, magazines, billboards and the www.FedsHireVets.gov web site that encourages Veterans to apply for jobs in the federal sector while simultaneously working with federal agencies to hire additional Veterans.

While one of every four federal employees is a Veteran, those numbers are skewered by the large percentage of Veterans working for the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. Many other federal agencies hire much smaller numbers of Veterans, and the Veterans Employment Initiative will focus on educating those agencies on the benefits of utilizing the job skills and dedication to service possessed by Veterans.

Buckley will be traveling to Washington, DC and other major cities to speak at national conferences and otherwise promote the Veterans Employment Initiative. He is scheduled to go back to the Capitol twice more this year and has been told he will have the opportunity to meet and talk with President Obama during one of those visits.

And how is he handling his newfound celebrity?

"Veterans come up to me all the time and say they saw me on TV or on a billboard," Buckley said. They're usually very enthusiastic because they see me as one of their own and know what I am trying to accomplish. A lot of Veterans have come back home and are unemployed and very excited that I am working to open up new jobs."

"I love doing this," he continued. "It is an opportunity to represent Veterans as a whole and in a positive manner. We are demonstrating that Veterans are not just capable of serving in the military, but have the skills and leadership qualities that make them outstanding employees."

Onsite Post Deployment Health Reassessment for Returning Vets

Post Deployment Health Reassessments (PDHRA) were established in 2006 to address the physical and mental health needs of service members three to six months after returning from deployment and link them up with VA for care. Since then, almost 300,000 service members nationwide have received screenings, with approximately 60,000 referred to VA medical centers for follow up.

The objective of the PDHRA is to educate, screen, assess and identify any possible medical conditions stemming from combat deployments. Typically, these have been held in hotels and not VA medical centers.

Realizing the limitations of holding these events off-site, Jesse Brown VAMC became the first VA in the State of Illinois, and only the fifth in the Nation, to host a PDHRA at the medical center on July 17 when it welcomed 125 National Guard members. Another PDHRA was held on for September 11th.

The advantages of holding these programs at the medical center include:

- VA can enroll new Veterans and vest them as patients on site. They will receive VA ID cards, be screened for any medical or mental health conditions and receive follow-up appointments.
- Veterans will tour the clinic designated for Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, meet the professional staff and establish a relationship with their health care providers. This will also help to remove any stigma Veterans may have about receiving care at VA.

- Veterans attending will have immediate access to emergency care, if needed, which is not possible when the event is held at a hotel

The PDHRAs offer a unique opportunity for VA and the Department of Defense to provide seamless care to Veterans transitioning from military to civilian life. Holding these events at the VA medical centers helps to strengthen that connection.

Madison

Tribute at the Main Entrance

The Main Entrance Lobby at the Madison VAH received a new look at the end of July. A plain wall was replaced with a tribute to America's Veterans on a lovely wood paneled wall. The mural, which measures over 16 feet in length and 6 feet in height, is a fitting, patriotic display that provides a memorable first impression to everyone entering the Madison VAH. The mural is comprised of the background of a waving American flag, the seal for each branch of the service, and the statement, "Serving & Honoring America's Veterans." The following quote is located to the left of the mural:

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

-George Washington Nov. 10, 1781

The reaction to the new mural has been outstanding from Veterans and their family members, staff, volunteers and visitors. Veterans have been especially pleased to see the emblems of all five branches of service represented.

Police Bike Patrol

A bike patrol was recently established by the Madison VAH Police Service. This form of travel makes it easier to navigate the grounds on patrol and ensure a safe and secure campus. The bike patrol has the added benefit of being environmentally conscious, which falls in line with the VA's going green initiative.

Pictured from left: Officers Derek Nelson and David U'Ren

Two of the Madison VAH police officers completed a 40 hour police bicycle officer course, which was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Police Department. This is mandatory training for anyone wanting to become involved with the bike patrol program. The officers patrol during the day, at night, on weekends, and on holidays, depending on the rotation of their tour of duty. Obviously, the weather will play a role on whether the bikes can be used or not.

The bikes were procured through donated funding and community support. This program is another way that the Madison VAH is working to provide customer service to all Veterans, visitors and staff.

VA Employees Support the Community

The staff of inpatient Unit 4A at the Madison VAH volunteered with Habitat for Humanity® of Dane County, Inc. recently to provide a well-deserved meal for volunteers at a construction site in Sun Prairie. The hospital staff involved included employees from Nursing, Nutrition and Food Service, Distributions and Environment Support Service.

In the week prior to the event, staff gathered the necessary ingredients for a "Fiesta Buffet," which allowed nearly every staff member to participate by bringing in various supplies or foods. The meal then was prepped the day before by the 4A staff, then others participated by serving the volunteer construction crew on-site on a Saturday.

Military Appreciation at the Dane County Fair

The Madison VAH recently participated in Military Appreciation Day at the Dane County Fair. Information was provided on Eligibility and Enrollment, MyHealtheVet, and OEF/OIF. Joining the Madison VAH staff at this event were representatives of the Madison Vet Center and the VA Regional Office.

A variety of individuals inquired as to the various VA services and benefits available. This included people from categories such as Active Duty members, OEF/OIF soldiers & Veterans, retired military, Tricare recipients, Veterans transferring care, and Veterans not enrolled in the VA.

Welcome Home Celebration 2010

The Madison VAH held its Third Annual Welcome Home Celebration for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans in July. This family event was held at a Madison Mallards Baseball game. Over 300 Veterans and family members were in attendance.

The Madison VAH OEF/OIF Team joined efforts with other VA and community partners to conduct the event. While Veterans were gathering information about VA health care and the Vet Center, benefits from the federal, state, and local levels, and employment resources, their children were entertained by having their faces painted. Other pre-game festivities included a ballpark food buffet, and musical entertainment by VA staff member Alan Woodrow.

The pre-game festivities included the opening pitch featured six female OEF/OIF Veterans and the national anthem with a gigantic U.S. flag unveiled by Veterans on the field.

Special guests on hand to personally welcome our newest Veterans included General Joe Brandemuehl, Army National Guard and Donna Williams, Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

Wonderful comments of appreciation were received from the Veterans that participated and their family members. Two local television stations and the major daily newspaper of Wisconsin covered the event.

Honoring Deceased Veterans

Patients, staff and visitors are noticing new covers on morgue carts utilized at the Madison VAH. These carts transport the deceased inpatients through the hallways of the facility to the morgue. The new covers depart in appearance from the traditional all-white ones, to tasteful fabrics with a respectful patriotic appearance: gold stars on a navy blue field or a quilted flag-type appearance.

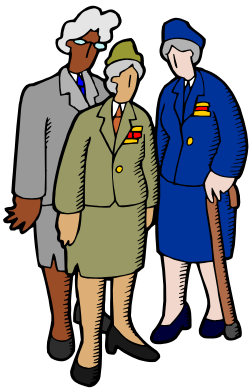
The intent of these decorative covers is to raise awareness and respect for deceased Veterans beginning from the time they are moved from their hospital rooms, on the first leg of their final journey. Their passing in the hallways and elevators has not drawn attention in the past in part due to the anonymity and lack of distinction of the usual white covers. The new covers signal the passing of one of America's Veterans and helps to acknowledge their individual service and sacrifice to our country.

Acute care hospitals do much to restore health and prolong life, but each of us knows the certainty of death can occur at a hospital as well. As the Madison VAH has the temporary opening of three designated Hospice and Palliative care beds on Unit 4A and then four permanent beds assigned to the Community Living Center (CLC) when it is completed in 2011, the provision of end of life care will become a routine practice. That level of care will be planned and conducted with the same knowledge, compassion and standard of excellence required in every other element of patient care.

As the facility's culture changes to embark on the official delivery of end-of-life care, they will collectively incorporate changes in the approach and response to showing respect for Veterans whose lives end.

Milwaukee

3rd Annual Wellness Fair for Women Veterans



All G.I.'s weren't named Joe. And to all the Jane's and Jill's and other women who wore combat boots, there has been a resounding message that Jill Feldman and Mitzi Dearborn wants you to know – there is a place for you and your care at the Zablocki VA Medical Center, and they want you to sign up for care.

The 3rd Annual Wellness Fair for Women Veterans took place on Sept. 22 and there were several displays and experts on hand to provide information on women's preventative health care, benefits and claims, violence against women, sobriety, creative arts and music therapy programs, heart health and vocational rehab.

In addition, there was information on employment skills, stress and anxiety, weight management, smoking cessation and more.

"This is a way for us to reach out and honor our women Veterans for their service," said Mitzi Dearborn, one of the event organizers. "We're always looking to enroll more women into the VA healthcare system. There are a number of services we offer, and even those who already get care here might not be aware of everything."

The number of female patients at the VA and Zablocki have risen steadily. According to Jill Feldman, the women's outreach coordinator at Zablocki, those numbers have increased 6 percent annually since 2004.

"We are seeing increased interest as word gets out," she said. "Some people still believe, incorrectly, that the VA is a male-dominated hospital, and we are working hard to change that perception."

Some of the services include:

- A women's health clinic, open 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- A full-time nurse practitioner and three physicians who hold clinics one to two times per week.
- Twenty-eight residents who have one to three clinics per month.
- Each Community Based Outreach Clinic has a mid-level practitioner or doctor who provides comprehensive primary care for women.
- Gynecology specialty care at the medical center. Eligible Veterans who receive their health care at the VA are entitled to maternity benefits. Patients choose an Obstetrician in their community and the VA pays for their maternity care, delivery and post partum exam.
- Mental health services are available at the medical center and each CBOC.

"The wellness fair gives us a chance to have a variety of information all in one convenient location," Dearborn said. "Whether people stop by for five minutes or five hours, they'll find a lot of useful information."

Dearborn, who has been on staff since 1994, said there's been a dramatic increase in care and outreach in that time.

When she first started working here, there were only 400 female patients. Last year, there were more than 3,000 and that number is expected to grow again.

Some of the additions over the years include women-only therapy groups and a special wing of the domiciliary that is just for female patients.

Flash Flood Hits Milwaukee Area

The call came in at 3:30 Friday afternoon and Jean Wroblewski knew her day would be a little longer.

The Red Cross was calling to see if the Zablocki VA Medical Center could provide 300 emergency meals for families whose homes were destroyed and severely damaged after one of the biggest storms in history caused flash flooding throughout the Milwaukee area.

And they needed it in two hours.

"We always have enough meals for seven days on hand, so we had to figure out when we were going to get resupplied, while preparing the meals the Red Cross needed," said Jean Wroblewski, the Nutrition and Food Service program manager. "The first day we just knew our day was going to be a little longer, and we were going to have to move fast."

Officials said the July 22 storm dumped nearly six inches of rain in two hours, causing floods that shut down the airport, freeways, roads and caused nearly $28 million in damage. More than 18,000 homes were severely damaged, said city officials.

While homeowners and the city tried to dry out and assess the damage, Zablocki's kitchen staff kicked into high gear.

At first, it looked like the VA would only have to provide meals through the weekend, but then the number was upped to 400 per day for an entire week. By the time it was over, the VA had made and provided 3,000 meals over an eight-day period.

While the VA has worked with the Red Cross to provide backup emergency feeding since 2001, it's typically only been a couple hundred meals here and there, but this was the biggest to date.

A request for so much food in so little time, might cause some to stress, but cooks Jason Borgwardt and Michael Herrick took it in stride.

"You can panic, or you can get it done," Borgwardt said. "We're both Vets, so when we got the first call, we just broke it down and said, 'OK, what do we need to do.'"

While some meals were made from scratch, others were more easily put together, like barbecued chicken patties and fries.

Borgwardt worked through what was supposed to be a couple days off, and the staff stayed busy a couple hours each day, devoted just to preparing the Red Cross food.

It had to be ready by 3:30 p.m. each day so Red Cross workers and volunteers could pick it up and have it ready to serve at shelters and homes across the Milwaukee area.

"You have to understand, some of the people getting this food have lost everything, photographs, 40 years of memories, entire homes," said Barbara Parisi, a disaster mental health specialist for the Milwaukee Red Cross. "We show up and tell them the food is from the VA, and they get tears in their eyes. Right now they are overwhelmed, but this gives them hope and strength to carry on."

Denise's Dynamite

"Strike three, you're out!!!" barked the umpire.

Then it was time to celebrate.

The Zablocki VA's wheelchair softball team, fondly known as Denise's Dynamite, broke the Wheelchair Mafia's 10-year winning streak and took home the championship with a 14-4 smack down, after a rousing day of competition on the hot asphalt.

The team consisted of many VA employees, their children, and friends who banded together to raise money for the Paralyzed Veterans of America Wisconsin chapter. The Wisconsin PVA will use that money to help support a Wisconsin team in the national wheelchair softball tournament.

Denise's Dynamite raised more than $200 for the event.

The local event placed able-bodied people into wheelchairs for a double-elimination tournament played on an asphalt parking lot. Ten teams from the community participated in the tourney, with Denise's Dynamite winning all three of its games.

Bryan Vail, Zablocki's Information Technology officer, connects with the ball.

Rules are similar to traditional softball, but the experience of playing in a wheelchair is challenging and fun, said coach and player, Denise Ott, for whom the team is named.

Catching fly balls becomes a little tougher when you don't have legs to guide your path. Hitting a softball is quite different, too, since you can't generate power from the lower half of your body. And it wasn't unusual for a player to lose balance and fall out of the chair.

Russ Schneider, a carpenter who works in the Research Department, takes a tumble.

"Winning the championship felt great, but finishing last would not have changed our outlook at all," said Brian Vail, one of the players. "We were there to have fun. It also makes you realize the challenges that people in a wheelchair face everyday."

Doing Research on Suicide

Michelle Cornette does not want you to die.

While Veteran and soldier suicides has been a hot topic lately in the news, it's something that has been on the forefront of Cornette's mind since at least 1995, and something she has actively studied as a VA employee since 2002.

The clinical psychologist who works in Zablocki's mental health department isn't just in the job of preventing suicides, she is doing in-depth studies to what causes a person to take that step, and see if new information can be gleaned to prevent needless deaths in the future.

"This has been my life's passion, and we are one of the few VAs that actually studies this," she said. "The study of suicide is still a relatively new field. It is hard to study because we can treat for depression, and we know about a lot of the risk factors, but that's still not a good predictor to pinpoint specifics. If someone completes a suicide, the outcome is lethal, and so to learn about this beforehand and prevent, can be very, very challenging."

Cornette is currently running two studies at the VA to get more answers.

One of the studies involves studying those who have attempted or have suicidal feelings, and comparing information with a control group that doesn't. Each group is interviewed, asked to fill out a list of questions and given specific computer tasks.

"Ultimately," Cornette said, "this is another way of helping Veterans and getting them the treatment they need. The more we understand about this topic, the more we can help those who need it."

Cornette said one of the biggest challenges is getting past mental health stigmas.

"Gradually, that is changing," she said. "You can see the way people react even when you compare Veterans from World War II, to Korea, to Vietnam, and now (Iraq and Afghanistan). People are more open about talking about these things now, but still, there is that mindset, that if you're a man, or a soldier, you have to keep that to yourself."

That has made prevention a particularly tricky subject for Veterans, she said, who are used to being part of a group.

"One theory we have is that people who attempt suicide perceive themselves to not belong or fit in," she said. "One of the protective factors of the military is the camaraderie and tremendous sense of belonging, but people may tend to lose that once they are out of the military.

"It's hard to answer all the questions, but we have to look at this from all sides," Cornette added. "One suicide is too many, but everything we do to study this helps save lives."

A Family Affair

For the Muellers, coming to work means working with family as well as caring for our Veterans.

Family patriarch, Carl Mueller, a physical therapy assistant, started the family employment "legacy" when he came on board as a physical therapy assistant more than four years ago, then brought along two of his three sons, Karl and Mark, both registered nurses.

The Mueller clan makes working for the Veterans Affairs a family affair, with all three (from left to right) employed at the Zablocki VA: Father Carl is a physical therapy assistant, his son Karl is a registered nurse in the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic, and his other son, Mark, is a registered nurse in the Community Living Center.

"I became interested in working at the VA during a tour of the department while I was a student at (the Milwaukee Area Technical College)," Carl Mueller said. "It appealed to me because it gave me an opportunity to serve the Veterans. I owe them so much for the freedom that all Americans enjoy."

Mueller spent 30 years in a factory setting before returning to school. And when he joined the VA, that inspired both of his sons.

Karl was already a nurse for 11 years when he joined the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic in 2006.

"My father was already working here and explained how much different the VA was from a private hospital, and how we can do so much more for Vets who have already sacrificed so much," he said. "Very often, especially on SCI, I see no expense is spared when caring for our Veterans. Cost very often is not a factor when deciding what treatment or intervention would best benefit the patient. This does not happen anywhere else."

Younger brother Mark, who came on board in 2007, and now works in the Community Living Center, added: “I became interested in working for the VA after hearing about it from my dad and brother. It’s an interesting population, and an interesting way to provide healthcare to a very deserving population.

“What appeals to me about working for the VA is the attitude people who work here have,” Mark Mueller said. “Most people are very dedicated to their job, and are so passionate to the Veteran population we work for.”

And the family isn’t shy about sharing their dedication and passion for the VA with others, Karl Mueller said.

“I love telling everyone and everybody that my brother is an RN on the 9th floor and my dad works in the PT department. “It is a reassuring factor to patients and families that not only do I think this is a great place for Veterans to come and receive care, so does my family,” he said.

The connection even goes a little deeper. Mark Mueller noted that his grandfather was a patient here and loved it.

“I wanted to give back the compassionate care (my grandfather) received when he came to the VA. “The best part about having both my brother and father work here is that we get to share some of the same patients,” he added. “I remember one Veteran saying to me, ‘I saw your dad down in PT this morning and I told him how great of a job you do up here.’”

Sometimes Mark’s division — the Rehabilitation and Extended Community Care — sends Veterans to the Spinal Cord Injury unit for care. When this occurs, “They get to have my brother Karl as a nurse, which makes them feel more comfortable. Working in long-term care, the patients become a part of the family, and I’m glad to know that when one of them gets sick, another family member will be taking care of them.”

Black Belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Dave Rosenmarkle believes every man inherently wants to be tested in life and he tests himself everyday as a teacher. He doesn’t teach with textbooks, and his teaching style is a bit different.

When Rosenmarkle isn’t working at the Zablocki VA as intern inventory management specialist, he’s teaching his students how to effectively and efficiently physically beat an opponent down with their fists.

But, he said, there is so much more to mixed martial arts. “I essentially teach a philosophy and spirituality,” Rosenmarkle said.

The 32-year-old Rosenmarkle, a husband and father of five daughters, is the lead professor at the Gracie Barra Wisconsin martial arts gym in Kenosha, WI, and he has made it his life.

“A martial artist isn’t really a master of fighting, but a master of themselves. They are a master of themselves and they’re in control of themselves,” Rosenmarkle said.

Dave Rosenmarkle, (left) a black belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, teaches another student how to attack.

Rosenmarkle is a black belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu but not long ago – at the age of 23 – he said he hadn't yet found his test in life yet, he was born in Petersburg, VA, and spent his teenage years in a military boarding school. He later attended college at Frostburg State University in Frostburg, MD, and after a two-year stint joined the Army as a supply technician. He's an Iraqi War Veteran and spent eight years in uniform.

But it was martial arts where he found his true calling, and now he passes those lessons on to others. Inspiration and respect is part of what Rosenmarkle teaches said one of his students at the Gracie Barra gym. He also said he learned more than just marital art techniques.

"He taught me to just be respectful to everyone I meet whatever the situation," student Eric Stone said. Rosenmarkle uses kicks, punch and grapples to teach life lessons.

"He treats everyone here (Barra Gym) like family," said student Russel Jackson, "and genuinely cares about everyone here."

North Chicago

USS Osborne Remains Critical Component in Recruit Dental Readiness

When the more than 38,000 U.S. Navy recruits are inducted and trained at the "Gateway to the Navy" each year in Great Lakes, IL, there is an enormous amount of processing and work that goes on beyond the marching and saluting. Part of their 8.5 weeks of basic military training includes 20 hours of dental availability, or 1.1-percent of their total time. When they have the dental work done, it is completed at Bldg. 1017, USS Osborne.

"When you consider that nearly 75-percent of recruits require some type of dentistry under tight time constraints, you can see that our work is cut out for us," said CAPT (Dr.) Mark Gilberts, NHCGL Director of Dental Services. "To put the workload into perspective, last year Naval Health Clinic completed $71 million in dental work.

Of that, $48 million was completed at USS Osborne. That's just an astounding figure when you think of the time constraints we're working against."

Gilberts noted that the 225-member team at Bldg. 1017 is the largest and most productive in the US Navy. They have nearly 28,500 recruits coming through the door each year for dental work ranging from simple cleanings to comprehensive dental work. Heading that work is USS Osborne is Acting Department Head Cmdr. (Dr.) Martin Anerino.

"As the only remaining recruit training center for the U.S. Navy, we are the gateway for all enlisted Navy personnel," said Anerino. "At times, our patients leave here bound for very remote areas, including ships and submarines that do not have dental care readily accessible. For this reason, it's our mission to have our patient's dental work as complete as possible before they graduate."

USS Osborne is one of five Branch Medical Clinics assigned to Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes. When the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center stands up Oct. 1, it will be part of the East Campus, along with USS Red Rover and Fisher Clinic.

"With our current economic situation, it is not uncommon to hear recruits say that they joined the Navy for the medical and dental benefits, as well as a personal commitment to their country," said Anerino. "This commitment is also true with the staff. The majority of them are active duty, retired or former military; so, they realize how important it is to deliver a deployable, dental-ready sailor to the Navy."

Anerino noted that the services offered at USS Osborne include dental cleanings, fillings, root canal treatment, oral surgical procedures and even prosthodontic services such as crowns and dentures. They use state-of-the-art technology and the latest techniques available for their patient population.

Gilberts explained that achieving 95-percent Recruit Operational Dental Readiness is USS Osborne's primary mission, and that the men and women accomplishing the mission are very good at what they do. "Our active duty and civilians professionals at USS Osborne are absolutely committed to our mission, and we truly couldn't do it without them," he said.

For Gilberts, the mission of USS Osborne is a passion. "Having spent more than 13 years here, I can truly say that my heart is with the clinic and staff of the USS Osborne," said Gilberts. "It has been, hands down, the crux of my military career."

7th Annual Classic Car Show

Jimmy Anderson, North Chicago VA Medical Center, volunteers at the grill during the 7th Annual Classic Car Show that was held on July 17th.

Tomah

$2.6 Million Renovation

The Tomah VA recently completed a major renovation to Building 400 and now provides area Veterans with medical imaging (X-ray, Computed Tomography) services on-site. The renovation includes $1.5 million in state-of-the-art medical imaging equipment and $1.1 million in construction. Magnetic Resonating Imagery (MRI) services to Veterans are provided on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Prior to completion of the project, Veterans requiring medical imaging services routinely traveled to the VA hospital in Madison, WI.

In addition to the reduction of travel time for Veterans, several other factors contributed to the capital expenditure intended to improve the quality and value of patient care delivery:

- **Enhance customer service** by providing medical imaging in one location with same day access 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- **Improve coordination of care/quality control** by coordinating medical imaging in-house vs. externally.
- **Reduce back log** at other facilities within the region.
- **Offer more services** for high risk patients such as virtual colonoscopy.

"We expect the impact to be immediate for Veterans," said Lisa Bemis, Diagnostic Radiology Technologist. "With the new equipment we anticipate a 75% reduction in time Veterans will have to spend on the imaging table, a 40% reduction in radiation dose, and a 30% reduction in contrast media Veterans need to take for imaging."

Another important feature of the new 64 slice CT scanner is the ability to do virtual colonoscopies which will result in the reduction of invasive colonoscopies. An invasive colonoscopy exam costs approximately $1,744. We are projecting as many as 250 invasive colonoscopy exams for high risk patients in 2010," said Bemis. "By utilizing the virtual colonoscopy procedure we could realize a savings of $436,000."

Construction for the medical imaging renovation project included the addition of two exam rooms, an ultrasound exam suite, an expanded waiting room for Veterans and office space for the medical imaging team. The renovation also required a slight expansion of the existing building to accommodate some of the medical imaging equipment.

VA Mobile Clinic to Help Veterans Manage Chronic Diseases

On Wednesday, June 30, 2010, the Tomah VA Medical Center (VAMC) accepted the delivery of a state-of-the-art, Mobile Veteran's Clinic. The new Mobile Clinic is part of the $1.3 million dollar grant that was awarded to the Intensive Clinical Care Management (ICCM) team in December 2009 consisting of Nurse Practitioner, Peggy Dwyer, RN Care Manager, Linda Martens, Registered Dietitian, Faye Moseley-Rezin, CDE, Greta Rice, LPN and Medical Center Director, Jerald D. Molnar.

The funding will be dispersed during FY 2010-2012. ICCM is a chronic disease management program designed to assist 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 calls, 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 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 project. Since receiving the additional funding in January, 2010 the ICCM Diabetes program has expanded the number of on-site clinics and participants are demonstrating improved control of their diabetes, blood pressure and LDL cholesterol levels.

The new Mobile Clinic allows the ICCM team to bring this program to patients living a distance from the main campus who would otherwise be unable to participate. By September 2010, it is expected that the Mobile Clinic will be providing the ICCM Diabetes program in the Lacrosse, Wausau, Wisconsin Rapids and Loyal areas with specific sites yet to be determined. The ICCM Diabetes program expansion including the new Mobile Clinic is made possible by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Office of Systems Redesign, Improvement Capability Grant funding.

65th Anniversary of USS Indianapolis

On Sunday morning, August 1, 2010 in Indianapolis, Indiana about 500 people gathered to pay tribute to 24 of the remaining 59 survivors of the USS Indianapolis on the 65th anniversary of one of the most remarkable

events in modern human history. Tomah VA Veteran Robert M. Witzig was one of those survivors. One could argue they're no ordinary WWII Veterans. You see the men of the USS Indianapolis were a valiant crew.

Tomah VA Veteran Robert Witzig and fellow survivor Clarence Hershberger from Florida in front of a 12 foot replica of the USS Indianapolis.

They earned 10 battles stars fighting at such horrific places as Guadalcanal, Midway, Tarawa, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The ship was so majestic it was designated as the Ship of State for President Roosevelt when he traveled and served as the flagship for Admiral Raymond Spruance when she sailed at sea.

In March 1945, at Okinawa, the Indy was kamikazed. The concussion blew two gaping holes in the keel which flooded nearby compartments, killing nine crewmen. The ship's bulkheads prevented any progressive flooding. The *Indianapolis*, settling slightly by the stern and listed to port, steamed to a salvage ship for emergency repairs. Here, inspection revealed that her propeller shafts were damaged, her fuel tanks ruptured, her water-distilling equipment ruined.

After major repairs and an overhaul, *Indianapolis* received orders to proceed to Tinian Island, carrying parts and the enriched uranium for the atomic bomb Little Boy, which would later be dropped on Hirsohima. The *Indianapolis* departed San Francisco on 16 July. Arriving at Pearl Harbor on 19 July, she raced on unaccompanied, reaching Tinian on 26 July. She delivered her top-secret package. *Indianapolis* was then sent to Guam where a number of the crew who had completed their tours of duty were replaced by other sailors.

Almost 30% of the crew changed over. Leaving Guam on 28 July, she began sailing toward Leyte Gulf where her crew was to receive training before continuing on to join Task Force 95. At 0014 on 30 July, she was struck by two torpedoes from Japanese submarine I-58 under the command of Mochitsura Hashimoto. The explosions caused massive damage, causing *Indianapolis* to sink in just 12 minutes. The Japanese submarine had gone undetected prior to the attack because of the lack of effective submarine detection equipment on the American ship.

About 300 of the 1,196 men on board died in the sinking. The rest of the crew, 880 men, with few lifeboats and many without lifejackets, floated in the water awaiting rescue. However, the Navy command had no knowledge of the sinking (the failure of the ship to arrive at her destination not having been noticed) until survivors were spotted four and a half days later, at 1025 on 2 August by pilot Lieutenant Wilbur (Chuck) Gwinn and copilot Lieutenant Warren Colwell on a routine patrol flight. Only 321 crew came out of the water alive, with 317 ultimately surviving. They suffered from lack of food and water, exposure to the elements (hypothermia, dehydration, hypernatremia, photophobia, starvation and dementia), severe desquamantion, and shark attacks, while some of the men killed themselves and/or one another in various states of delirium and hallucinations. The sinking of the USS Indianapolis resulted in the most shark attacks on humans in history.

24th 2010 Platoon Run Car and Motorcycle Show

(l to r: Best Car, 1963 Blue Chevy Nova, Duane and Julie Evanson, son Tom; Best Motorcycle, 2001 Honda Goldwing, Mark Mattke; Best in Show, 1963 Studebaker, Bob and Colleen Carl)

nasa Golf Tournament Donates Equipment for VA Golf Course

The North American Squirrel Association (nasa – small cased so as not to be confused with "the" NASA!) held a day-long golf tournament at the Veterans' Golf Course on July 31. The event was to raise money to purchase adaptive sports equipment for the Tomah VA. To the delight of the VA staff on duty that day, the equipment was already purchased and delivered!

Sandy Gregar, Associate Director, poses with Dave Conklin, nasa's Outdoor Recreation Chairperson, and Pat Lamke, President of nasa.

The donations received were:

- Two hand-pedaled "bicycles" with three wheels which can be ridden by individuals with lower body paralysis, weakness or amputations
- One adaptive golf cart
- One telescopic fishing pole

The golf tournament ran all day with teams turning in their scores, entering tickets in raffle buckets, and eating lunch as they came and went. At the end of the day, results were tallied, tickets were pulled and winners notified.

Several patients were anxious to give the bicycles a try. (Henry Weinberger with Supervisory Recreation Therapist

End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium for Veterans

Nurses spend more time with patients who are facing the end of life than any other member of the health care team. Yet, studies have shown that many nurses feel inadequately prepared to provide the comprehensive care so important at the end of life.

More than 54,000 American Veterans-mostly from World War II and Korea---die each month, and the Department of Veterans Affairs 3-year Comprehensive End-of-Life Care Initiative is trying to improve hospice and palliative care for these Veterans.

Given that the number of Vietnam-era Veterans are over 65 will continue to grow through 2034, so too will the need for hospice and palliative care in the VA system.

Michelle Kuehl, RN, Country Inn (402A) recently attended the first national ELNEC- For Veterans "Train the Trainer" course. This two day course on end-of-life care was held in Pasadena, California.

This program titled "End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium- For Veterans Curriculum: Promoting Palliative Care For Veterans" is for nurses, nurse educators, and other interdisciplinary staff working in Veteran Administration (VA) facilities or other settings caring for Veterans.

(Pictured Left to Right, Jolene Renda DNP-VISN Palliative Care Program Manager, Rosemary Stetzer NP- Milwaukee VA, Michelle Kuehl-Tomah VAMC, Lynne O'Donnell-Jesse Brown, Margaret Walkosz NP- Hines VA, Connie Gudowicz RN-Iron Mountain VA, Sheila Schoedl LCSW-Madison VA.)

This project is led by Betty R. Ferrell, RN, PhD, FAAN, FPCN as the principle investigator and is collaboratively administered by the City of Hope, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in Washington, DC and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The principle goal of the training program is to provide information on end-of-life/palliative care and resources to integrate end-of-life/palliative content into VA facilities.

Course content was presented in several participatory formats including lecture, open forum discussion, small group activities, and training sessions. The trainers attending this program will be returning to Tomah VAMC to provide end of life care training to nursing staff as well as interested other interdisciplinary staff. This training will begin in November 2010.

Tomah VAMC will also participate in the pilot Hospice Education Network (HEN) by Weatherbee Resources. HEN provides online education for hospice and end-of-life care professionals. The ELNEC for Veterans training modules will be available on the HEN for staff to view anytime. This program is available by a VA grant during the next year.

Topic areas included roles of the nurse in end-of-life/ palliative care; pain and symptom assessment and management; cultural considerations; communication; loss, grief, and bereavement; final hours of life; and achieving quality improvement.

Awards and Recognition

Tony Spillie, **Hines** Social Work Executive, was recently honored with the 2010 Under Secretary for Health Award for Excellence in Social Work Leadership. This award, which is the highest award possible for VA social workers, was presented to Mr. Spillie at a ceremony in Washington DC this summer. VISN 12 Network Director Jeffrey Murawsky, was present at the ceremony when Dr. Robert Jesse, the Deputy Under Secretary For Health presented the award to Mr. Spillie.

Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, VISN 12 Network Director, Deborah Amdur, Chief Consultant for VA Social Work, Tony Spillie and Carol Sheets, VA's Director of Social Work were present when Tony Spillie was awarded the highest honor in VA social work in a Washington DC ceremony earlier this summer.

Mr. Spillie was nominated for this national award by the Hines Clinical Social Work team. The award nomination touted his professionalism, enthusiasm, leadership abilities and his dedication to patients.

"I am so proud that one of Hines' finest is being recognized at the national level with such a prestigious award," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "Tony is known throughout the hospital for his infectious enthusiasm and his undeniable commitment to our patients. It's great that the social work community and the VA at large is honoring him for this as well."

Mr. Spillie has been at Hines for more than 30 years. He began as a social worker in the Community Care Unit (now known as the Community Living Center) and worked his way up with increasing levels of responsibility until he became the Hines Social Work Executive in April of 2007. He provides leadership for 95 master prepared social workers located within the hospital's Mental Health and Behavioral Service Line. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and is heavily involved in many initiatives throughout the hospital.

"Coming to work every day is not work when you are able care for Veterans and their families," he said. "The work we do makes a difference in the lives of so many. I feel truly blessed to have been given this opportunity."

Terri M. Burgelbaugh, (right) **Iron Mountain** was recognized for achieving VHA Mentor certification at the Resident level. This certification recognizes the contribution and stewardship made by actively engaging in a mentor, coach, or preceptor role. She has played a key role in VHA's succession plan. We applaud her motivation for stepping up to further herself as a leader and to serve as one of the Departments cadre of teachers. Thank you!

Dr. Dean Krahn, **Madison** VAH Chief, Mental Health Service, was recently asked to join the Congressionally-mandated VA Under Secretary for Health's Special Committee on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This 12 person committee will advise the VA Secretary and ultimately Congress on the progress of the VA in clinical services, education and research on PTSD.

David Murray, Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioner at **Madison** VAH, has been selected to serve on the National Nursing Emergency Management Workgroup. This group provides recommendations and feedback to the National Nurse Executive Council's Workforce Management Goal Group on issues related to Emergency Management.

Several significant research studies were recently released at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease 2010. **Mark Sager, MD, and Sterling Johnson, Ph.D.,** two **Madison** VAH Alzheimer's researchers, made the news with their studies on Alzheimer's. Dr. Sager's research found that the group with the high risk version of the TOMM40 gene performed significantly worse on the tests of learning and memory than the group with the low risk version. Dr. Johnson's research suggests that there is a connection between the TOMM40 gene and brain cell loss in people who are relatively young and currently not symptomatic.

A recent issue of *On Wisconsin,* the University of Wisconsin (UW) Alumni and Friends publication, featured an article on the medical clinics operated by the Medical Information Center (MEDiC) at the Grace Episcopal Church in downtown Madison. The goal of this program is to improve the health of an underserved population and to give medical and other health care students a hands-on learning opportunity.

Madison VAH's own **Dr. Ted Goodfriend**, Associate Chief Of Staff/Research and UW professor emeritus of medicine and pharmacology, began this program in 1990 when seven medical students approached him on how they, with little clinical experience, could contribute to the social and medical needs of the community. Dr. Goodfriend and several students began going to the shelter once a week in 1991, and soon after, a clinic opened at the Salvation Army to serve homeless families. Today MEDiC operates six clinics, each serving a distinct population with its own needs and challenges.

Madison VAH's Patient Flow Collaborative Team has been nationally recognized for its excellent work in the National Flow Collaboratives. They presented their most recent initiatives at the National Collaborative in Phoenix, Arizona.

These collaboratives focus on implementing and enhancing the flow of a Veteran's hospital stay from admission to discharge with an emphasis on strong practices and technological tools that maximize efficient flow processes. The Madison Team is comprised of interdisciplinary representatives from Nursing, Pharmacy, Social Work, Internal Medicine, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Utilization Review, and the Emergency Department.

Three team members presented on the Madison VAH discharge ticket pilot project in progress on Unit 4B and their project to reduce the overall length of stay for planned total knee replacements.

Beth Hammer, a cardiac nurse practitioner at the **Zablocki VA (Milwaukee)**, will complete her two-year term July 1 as president of the American Association of Critical Care Nursing.

She spent much of the last two years traveling the country to meet with nurses and other medical professionals to share the vision of the AACN of creating a "healthcare system driven by the needs of patients and families where acute and critical care nurses can make optimal contributions."

There are more than 85,000 members in the AACN, and Hammer was elected by the board.
"This is the largest professional nursing organization in the country and it's a very big deal. It's indicative of Beth's leadership skills, and shows the caliber of nurses and the care we provide at the VA," said Judy Murphy, the former Zablocki's associate director of patient and nursing services.

Hammer rounded out her term with a keynote address May 17 in Washington, D.C., where she shared stories of nurses going above and beyond -— granting a dying boy's wish to see his dog in the hospital, or another nurse who had the training and saved a mom's life while she gave birth.

"These are things I've seen and heard about in my travels. These are what nurses do every day," she said. Hammer came to the VA 24 years ago with hopes of "getting some experience and then finding a real hospital.

"But what I found out is we are a real hospital, we just don't often brag about ourselves, and we absolutely should, because we have great stories to tell. A lot of times the VA is cutting edge, and you just don't hear about it."

Zablocki's Speech Pathology Department is giving everyone something to talk about with its recent Community Partnership Award from The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's College of Health Sciences.

This annual award is given to only a few health care -related organizations or people for their outstanding contributions to the College of Health Sciences, its students and the Milwaukee community.

The Communication Sciences and Disorders Department in the College of Health Sciences nominated the Speech Pathology Department for its dedication to the academic and clinical education of speech pathology students, officials said.

Speech-Language pathologists from the VA who will share in the award are: **Adrienne Amman, Suzi Bloedel, Laura Gagala, Teri Nitschke and Pam Stein—Farkas.**

The **Zablocki** VA, along with the Medical College of Wisconsin, received a three-year, $490,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate the function of the human T cell leukemia virus type 2 (HTLV-2) and a genetically related retrovirus, HTLV-1.

These viruses have a worldwide geographic distribution and have been linked to leukemia and neurologic diseases. Their discovery resulted in sentinel research which culminated in the isolation and characterization of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

Dr. Mark A. Beilke, professor of medicine and chief of the division of infectious diseases at the Medical College, and chief of the division of infectious diseases at Zablocki, is the principal investigator for the Merit Review Award grant.

HTLV-2 infects white blood cells, and is transmitted at high rates among intravenous drug abusers. Beilke and his collaborators have shown that HTLV-2 may have potent ability to alter immunologic and clinical outcomes of people who are also infected with HIV. It is estimated that 900,000 Americans may be infected with HIV, and 5 percent of those with HTLV-2.

Someone You Should Know

Associate Director at Hines

Hines welcomed Mr. Peter Dancy as the hospital's new Associate Director this summer. Mr. Dancy came to Hines after serving as Associate Administrator (Chief Operating Officer) of Ben Taub General Hospital in Houston, Texas, a 597-bed Level I Trauma Center and the primary teaching hospital for Baylor College of Medicine.

Mr. Dancy is an Army Veteran who served for 22 years. His final military assignment was as Deputy Commander for Administration (Chief Operating Officer) for Moncrief Army Community Hospital, Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Prior to his retirement in December 2006, Mr. Dancy served in a variety of command and staff positions in the United States, Germany, and South Korea. He spent the majority of his military career providing operational support for hospitals and ambulatory care clinics.

"The combination of Mr. Dancy's experience, drive and energy will make him a huge asset to Hines," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "The fact that he is a Veteran on top of all that is another bid advantage. He can relate to our patients on a Veteran to Veteran level."

Mr. Dancy received his Master of Health Administration from Baylor University, his Master of Business Administration from St. Mary's University, and his Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Morehouse College. He is a board certified health care executive and Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. He also serves as an ambulatory health care surveyor with the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.

"In the short time I have been at Hines, I am already very impressed with the staff and with the great care that the hospital provides to our nation's Veterans," said Mr. Dancy. "I look forward to working with the staff to the facility's leadership to continue the tradition of top quality healthcare at Hines."

Assistant Director at Milwaukee

Milwaukee welcomed Andy Pacyna as the Center's new Assistant.

Pacyna arrived June 21 and oversees the Medical Information Systems division, Environmental Management, Privacy, Voluntary Service, Occupational Safety, Public Affairs and Community Relations.

Mr. Pacyna is a native of Cleveland, Ohio. He has been part of the VA for seven years, but it's not his first experience with Veterans. "My father and uncle were both Veterans and I've always had an immense amount of respect and admiration for the devotion and sacrifices our service men and women make for their country," he said.

With that in mind, he looked to a career in the VA after receiving his master's degree in health services administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati. He sought out fellowship opportunities and started as a trainee at the Syracuse VA Medical Center.

After training, he stuck around Syracuse to become the information security officer, with a collateral duty as the aide to the chief of staff.

He moved to the VA Maryland Health Care System in Baltimore and Perry Point, Md., to take a position as the executive assistant to the associate director for finance. He also handled strategic planning and served as the acting associate chief for Medical Administration Service and the acting chief of Human Resources.

That has helped shape his outlook in his new role at Milwaukee. "All of those positions provided a breadth of leadership perspective and technical experience that form a well-rounded foundation to build on," he said.

Pacyna's leadership philosophy is simple: "Act responsibly and ethically with the customer's needs always first."

Associate Director Retires

Time is of the essence for Larry Berkeley. The Associate Director of the Zablocki VA Medical Center spent the last full day on the job Sept. 30.

But a couple weeks before that pivotal day, he still had a lot of work to do, and he's not ready to think about a rocking chair by the beach.

He'll still be seen around the halls as he works part-time on the Strategic Asset Management program -- SAM for short. The new windows-based system will modernize the way the VA handles logistics with a state-of-the-art system, and Milwaukee is at the forefront of making it happen.

In the middle of meetings and getting done with what he can get done, he talked about his career and where he'll go from here.

Q: What goes through your mind in the morning when you walk through the door and know you are down to a couple more weeks?
A: There is still a lot to do, and a lot of loose ends, so most of the time I'm thinking about what I still need to try to accomplish. I'm not done by a long shot. I hope to come back part-time to finish the SAM project.

Q: When did you start at the VA?
A: I started in Walla Walla, Wash., after getting my master's degree in hospital administration, in 1975. I was 26. It was an opportunity to begin my career. Didn't know if I would be in the VA forever, but I did look at it as a career. From there I went to Phoenix, Houston, Dallas, Fayetteville, Ark.; and back to Houston and then Milwaukee in 1993.

Q: What is something you are most proud of?
A.: I was involved in some really neat things. I started with the project on the new Houston Medical Center. It was pretty unusual. I was the person that got involved in the planning, and then the activation from different roles. It took about 10 years to get that hospital from conception to it being there, and I moved around a few times. To be able to start it and finish it was nice. Then to be here for this period of time and be involved with some really great people and to have gone through so many changes in the Milwaukee VA -- the growth, the change in how we've been organized. To be part of a staff that is looked at so favorably for creativity and for what we accomplish, and the input we have. We've sent a lot of people to Washington to do some neat things.

Q: What is something people don't know about this job that might change their opinions?
A: If you are someone who has to see concrete results quickly for the activities you've been doing, then these aren't the jobs for you, because things take long, and other people are genuinely doing the activity while we are trying to organize the resources to get them done. All the planning we do and the projects take time to conceive it until the time you walk into a new building or area. They were trying to take care of the new Spinal Cord Injury Clinic before I got here. It is gratifying when you see something completed. Part of it is you are competing for national resources. There is a process and procedure. It's not like we are our own entity. We don't control our own destiny in a lot of ways. We have to compete and wait until resources are available to get things done that need to get done. When you get into new programs, it takes time to understand how it works. Generally things that happen up here involve people from across the medical center and they all have input and their own ideas, and we have to bring that together.

Q: A lot of big projects are in the works or planning stages here – from the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic to the Fisher House and Community Living Centers. What do you think this says about the VA?
A: I think it says we are a constantly evolving organization and we are trying to stay in the mainstream if not the forefront of many aspects of providing the best care to Veterans – that they are getting the most modern, most proven techniques, procedures and equipment that man has to offer. It says we're an active, vital organization where there is a huge demand for our services. It's very rewarding that there is a huge demand for services because that means we are doing a great job.

Q: Anything to add?
A: I won't miss the meetings, but what I'm really going to miss are the people. That's the bottom line. The people out there working every day who really care and do a great job, I will miss working with them very much.

30th Annual National Wheelchair Games

Independence Day held special meaning for the six-member North Chicago War Hawks team that participated in the 30th Annual National Wheelchair Games in Denver, CO, July 4. For the fourth consecutive year, the team competed for six days in both individual and team sporting events, such as power soccer, nine ball, archery, power chair and table tennis.

At the conclusion of the games, all six team members took home at least one medal for their skills and efforts during this year's games. In total, the War Hawks brought back 12 gold, silver and bronze metals to North Chicago.

For U.S. Army Veteran Nate Davenport of North Chicago, IL, participation in the games is not about winning metals, but rather camaraderie. "The games are a place to make new friends and rekindle old friendships," he said. "These games are uplifting because they give you confidence in yourself, despite your disability and lets you know that there is something to live for."

U.S. Navy Veteran Karen Van Benschoten of Racine, WI, shared similar sentiments as Davenport. "The games are all about the camaraderie with other Veterans, and cheering one another on," said Van Benschoten.

Setting a record this year, nearly 500 Veterans from all 50 states participated in the wheelchair games this year. Veterans even came from as far as the United Kingdom and Guam. Although the events featured a variety of athletic events, they also included an array of social events, such as barbeques, dinners, music events and more. For U.S. Air Force Veteran Steve Aoyagi of Des Plaines, IL, his favorite part of the games was the "Kids Day" because he had an opportunity to mentor and interact with disabled children from Denver. "It was the most meaningful day for me," he said. "It was amazing to see the smiles and determination on the faces of the kids."

Aoyagi noted that the events often show Veterans exactly how far their abilities can take them. "It's difficult for me on a daily basis to walk for long distances or climb stairs," said U.S. Air Force Veteran Steve Aoyagi of Des Plaines, IL. "The games truly make me realize I can do. They help us surpass what we think we can do."

Along with Van Benschoten, Davenport and Aoyagi, the team includes U.S. Air Force Veteran Steve Malone of Waukegan, IL; U.S. Marine Corps Veteran David Wells of Gurnee, IL; and, U.S. Army Veteran Ramon Calderon of Waukegan, IL.

Susanne Brunner, North Chicago VA Medical Center recreation therapist and War Hawks co-coach, explained that the team worked very hard to prepare for the games this year. "They not only practiced their individual sports, but also helped raise donations through the same of baked goods, key chains and candy," she said.

"Many of us are lucky enough to easily get up in the morning and do the routines we often just take for granted: sitting up, walking from our room, brushing our teeth, showering, etc.," said Marianne Semrad, North Chicago VA Medical Center Associate Director. "I'm not only inspired by every single one of these Veteran who put their physical issues aside, but I'm absolutely impressed by their athletic abilities --with or without wheelchairs. These men and women are truly athletes."

Michael Kabat, (above) a decorated Vietnam Veteran from Onalaska, is a people person. As a salesman of plumbing equipment throughout western Wisconsin he traveled many a road and stopped in often to just say hello, not only to his customers but the local clerk at a convenience store.

If there was something special in their life, a birthday or anniversary, he remembered it, just to make them feel special. When he wasn't driving from destination to destination, Michael ran there. He competed in marathons and during the course of his adult life logged over 40,000 miles.

Then one day in September 2008, while cross-training for a marathon, he crashed on his bicycle. Life changed. That fast. What do they say? In the blink of an eye.

"I was descending down a hill," said Michael, "and looked back toward my riding partners behind me. That's all I really remember."

Two weeks later, he awoke in a hospital bed with his family all around him. His son was squeezing his feet.

"You can't feel this, Dad, can you?," asked Michael's son. "No," he replied. "Dad, you're paralyzed." Michael doesn't even remember his initial reaction to those words. "Maybe it was 'wow' or something," he says. He and his riding partners would later connect the pieces of the story that changed his life.

"I had gotten out in front of them quite a ways," said Michael. "After I looked back, I had fallen into a five-foot ditch on the side of the road. They rode right passed me, all the way to the YMCA. They were kind of curious where I was, but figured I would show up eventually."

The team had showered and when Michael didn't show up by then, they jumped into their cars and went looking for him. They saw his bicycle first.

"The back wheel was sticking up out of the high grass," he said. "They found me lying down in the ditch. I had been there for about an hour."

A flight for life helicopter flew Kabat to Gunderson Lutheran Hospital where he spent the next three months learning to cope with his injury and facing life as a quadriplegic.

"I've never looked at this injury as a punishment from God," said Michael. "It's just an extra crutch to bear."

Michael Kabat returned home to Onalaska in December 2008 just before Christmas. Ahead of him and his wife, Debbie, were a mountain of major life changes. They had to adapt their entire tri-level home. Take out the stairs? Yes. Install an elevator? They did. Ceiling lift? Of course. Handicapped vehicle? Absolutely. Plans for the future? All changed.

"Try to imagine life the way you know it," said Debbie. "And then, suddenly, you are completely dependant on a caregiver. Everything has changed. This unfortunate accident didn't only happen to Michael, it happened to both of us."

By 2010, Michael had advanced far enough in his therapy that Recreation Therapists at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center recommended he consider attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Denver. Long before a Veteran attends an event of this magnitude or even before he goes home, providers, nurses and therapists focus on getting them back into the community first.

"We try to find out what makes them tick," said Brian Walker a Recreation Therapist for 20 years at the Milwaukee VA, who now serves as their Community Relations Manager, "our entire focus is getting the Veterans back into the community, not the hospital, which includes different challenges like getting through doors or how to use transportation."

Getting a Veteran to attend the games is more of a long range goal—certainly one suited for Michael's competitiveness.

"We try to get the novice or a Veteran with a newer injury to come to the games," said Walker. "To see it, to experience it. The games really show the VA at their best."

Michael Kabat was one of twenty-one Veterans with spinal cord injuries attending the games representing the Milwaukee VA. He competed in four events (motorized wheelchair rally, motorized slalom, powerchair 200 relay and powerchair soccer) earning a gold medal in the motorized wheelchair rally, an event held at Invesco Park, the home of the Denver Broncos. Although a strong competitor, this year's games in Denver were more about camaraderie than competition.

"The games are just awesome," said Michael. "I'm really inspired. I've learned so much about things I didn't know about living in a wheelchair and I met so many great friends."

Since that fateful day in September, there have been good days and bad. Some certainly easier than others. But throughout, Michael has remained positive maintaining his sense of humor. He is still known to friends as "Mustard Mike" and plans to visit soon the new mustard museum in Middleton, Wisconsin which recently relocated from Mount Horeb.

He is certain there will come a time when he will run again. "I'll run another marathon in heaven," said Michael flashing a big grin.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the largest annual wheelchair sports competition for disabled Veterans in the world, and is presented each year by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Paralyzed Veterans of America. More information about the games can be found at www.wheelchairgames.va.gov.

Two VA Medical Centers, Jesse Brown and North Chicago Held Baby Showers

Expectant and new mothers attending a Baby Shower at JBVAMC's Women's Health Clinic receive more than just gifts. They also walked out with a lot more knowledge to help them prepare and care for their prospective children.

"This was the first child for a lot of the women attending our first shower," said Dr. Kinna Patel, Women Veterans Program Manager, "and they had a lot of questions about the changes they were experiencing in their own bodies as well as questions about how to care for their babies."

JBVAMC's Women's Health Clinic held its first annual Baby Shower in June, with 11 new or expecting mothers and their guests in attendance. They received advice from staff regarding general OB/GYNE, medications, newborn care, parenting classes available in the community and symptoms and treatment for post-partum depression, as well as information on prosthetic devices like breast pumps and nursing bras they are eligible to receive from VA.

They each carried home a gift bag filled with diapers, baby safety and grooming kits that will undoubtedly come in handy over the next several months. The gift bags had been prepared by Voluntary Service with items donated by Veterans service organizations.

Dr. Patel said she received the idea to hold a baby shower after learning of a similar program at a VA medical center in California.

"Many expecting women do not realize everything VA can do for them and the information we can provide," said Dr. Patel.

Ms. Ebonie Hall, a Veteran expecting twins, was among the new and expectant mothers who received baby shower gift bags from Dr. Kinna Patel and the JBVAMC Women's Health Clinic.

"It was a good opportunity to introduce our affiliates in OB/GYNE and to provide them with timely and necessary information to care for themselves and their babies."

Dr. Patel said about 20 Veterans at JBVAMC are pregnant or had delivered within the past six months. And with the younger generation of Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, that figure is sure to increase over the next several years.

Eight-month-old Kendrick Pratt, Jr. closely examines a cardiopulmonary resuscitation mannequin at a North Chicago VA Medical Center group baby shower July 14, while his father, Kendrick Pope Pratt, Sr., looks on.

The Pratt family joined nearly a dozen other military Veterans from throughout northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin for the unique celebration, which was extended to women Veterans from the North Chicago VA Medical Center and Community Based Outpatient Clinics who have had their babies within one year, or are expecting.

The Veteran mothers are residents of many surrounding communities, including Kenosha, Wis., and the Illinois cities of Waukegan, Antioch, Round Lake Park, Winthrop Harbor, Mundelein, Gurnee, Lake Villa and Chicago.

Two Milwaukee VA Police Officers Jump in the Lake to Save a Distraught Veteran

Lt. Detective Mark Zamborini and Officer Nathan (left) Johnson were lauded by Chief of police Tim Jantz for disregarding their own safety by pulling the man out of the water after he made it to the middle of Lake Wheeler and went underwater.

"They performed their job wonderfully, in a situation that doesn't typically come up." Jantz said. "They were swift, controlled the situation and absolutely saved that person's life."

Jantz has submitted the two for a local award as well as national recognition, but to the cops involved, it was all part of a day's work.

Johnson was on vehicle patrol about 9:30 a.m. when he was asked to assist Zamborini for a situation at Lake Wheeler. When he arrived a few moments later, Zamborini was trying to calm down the man, who was in his early 30s, and already walking in the lake.

The man start walking toward the middle of Lake Wheeler and a few seconds later dunked underwater and didn't immediately re-emerge. The two police officers swarmed into the water, with Zamborini circling to the man's right, and Johnson to his left. The man came up out of the water and initially resisted before Johnson got behind him in a bear hug and Zamborini secured his arms.

"In that kind of situation, you have to react quickly," Johnson said. "We jumped in, and immediately start sinking in the muck, and then it starts to get deeper." He credited his military water survival training for knowing how to grab the Veteran and get him safely to shore.

"At that point, we didn't know what could happen. We didn't know if he'd fight or try to pull us under. Neither of us were concerned for our safety. It was about helping the guy." The man initially asked to be let go.

"I can't do that, man," Zamborini told him. "Calm down, and I'm going to get you out of here." Zamborini said it was part of police training to remain calm so the situation didn't escalate.

"You have to keep a passive, calm voice, or someone who is excited will feed off your excitement," he said. The two police got him to shore where he was taken to the hospital and given medical treatment.

"I love this job because every day is different, and every day is exciting," Johnson said. "This is community policing. It's not always about arresting people. It's about helping Veterans like me."Both officers are military Veterans. Zamborini spent 10 years in the Air Force. Johnson spent 10 years in the Marines and saw combat in Iraq. He also did a stint in the Air National Guard, and is now a lieutenant in the Army Reserves.

He downplays his own history, even though he was decorated with valor for his combat time in Iraq. "That's something pretty for the uniform," he shrugged. "I think it helps me in my job now because I can relate to Veterans. I can be sympathetic because I know what they've gone through."

Zamborini (left) said while the rescue was unusual, it's just one of many situations an officer might experience in a given day. "It was an unpleasant experience, but that's our job," he said.

"These officers here, on a day-to-day basis, do a lot more, and deserve recognition for what they are doing every day. These officers deal with a multitude of risks, and are always working hard, and ready for anything."

America's First Federal Health Care Center Successfully Launched on October 1, 2010

October 1 was the standup of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, the nation's first fully integrated Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs health care center in North Chicago, IL.

A $13 million VA renovation and modernization project to expand the Emergency and Surgery Departments was completed in 2006 for Phase 2 of the integration. One of the major tasks has been construction. To accommodate the clinics currently at Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes, Naval Facilities Engineering Command renovated more than 40,000 square feet on the west campus and constructed a new 209,945-square-foot Ambulatory Care Center.

"This is the point in the project where the contractor is finalizing the details and the finishing work, including testing the systems and ensuring everything is working to specification," said Lt. Cmdr. Joe Boyles, Navy Medicine East health facility planning project officer. "Looking back on the project, this has been an amazing opportunity to build and renovate state-of-art facilities to support America's military and Veterans."

Boyles noted that although the Ambulatory Care Center is scheduled to be transferred from the contractor to the government at the end of September, the placement of furnishings and move-in to the new addition will continue through the end of December.

There are many resources and programs taking shape that have not traditionally been seen at a VA. One program known to most Naval members is an ombudsman, which is Swedish for "representative."

Although ombudsmen cover many roles in the U.S. Navy, they are always a support network for spouses of deployed military members. According to Melissa Collier, ombudsman for the future Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, the word "representative" truly sums up exactly what the program is all about.

Ombudsman Roni Ebert speaks with a Navy spouse recently. Ebert is a 10-year Navy Veteran, and currently works at the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes' Fisher Clinic.

"We have a unique mission at the Lovell FHCC, caring for both military members and Veterans – which is why I would say that the role of an ombudsman is still critical," said Collier. "The added responsibility of specifically looking after spouses hasn't traditionally been necessary at most VAs, as military member support programs were frequented at the base. Now, with military members as an integral part of the facility, it's critical that members and supervisors understand the resources available from their ombudsman."

Collier explained that ombudsmen are communication links, information and referral resources, and advocates for military family members. They are volunteers and spouses of service members within the command, and can be essential when a military spouse is making due while their loved one is serving in another country.

"Life happens while a military member is deployed, and we're here to ensure everything runs smoothly at home while they're away," said Collier. "The bottom line is that we're here to take care of the family member when the active duty member isn't available to help."

Defining Excellence in the 21st Century

This past August, at the 2010 VHA Leadership Conference, the Under Secretary for Health, Robert A. Petzel, M.D., shared with Veteran Health Administrators new mission and vision statements.

He stated that "each of us has signed on for more than a job… we have a mission and debt of honor to the Veterans it is our solemn duty to care for.

He also introduced a new VHA Logo, VHA Mission Statement and VHA Vision Statement.

VA HEALTH CARE | Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

VHA Mission Statement
Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

VHA Vision Statement
VHA will continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient centered and evidence based.

This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement.

It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the nation's well-being through education, research and service in National emergencies.

The transformation aims to set the standard for serving Veterans and to be the model for the health care industry.

As a leader in the health care, VHA will focus on four major themes throughout the excellence campaign:

- Patient-centered
- Data driven
- Continuously improving
- Team based

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