



Once In a Lifetime Opportunity



It's not every day that you get to shake the hand of a true American hero....especially when that hero is the first living serviceman to receive the military's Medal of Honor since the Vietnam war. A group of Hines patients were thrilled to receive this once in a lifetime opportunity in December when Medal of Honor Recipient Army Staff Sgt Salvatore Giunta stopped by a nearby National Guard Armory to help celebrate the 374th Birthday of the Army National Guard.

SSG Giunta took the time to personally shake hands with more than 200 Veterans who were present for the ceremony and thanked them individually for their service.

President Obama pinned the Medal of Honor on SSG Giunta for his heroic actions in the war in Afghanistan in a White House ceremony in November. The Medal of Honor is the highest military award for bravery that can be given to an individual in the United States.



John Chrenka (right), a World War II Veteran who lives at the Hines VA Hospital's Community Living Center, was proud to share his military award, a Silver Star, with SSG Salvatore Giunta, the country's most recent recipient the military's highest honor for bravery, the Medal of Honor

"It was such an honor to meet this great American," said John Chrenka, a World War II Veteran who resides in the Hines Community Living Center.

Chrenka, who received the Silver Star for his actions while storming the beach in the Normandy invasion of World War II, said he was surprised when SSG Giunta thanked him for his service to the country. "What a class act," he said. "When I heard the story of his incredible bravery in combat, I was speechless....and that doesn't happen to me very often. Hearing this hero thank me for my service made me speechless again. It was a moment I will never forget."

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SSG Giunta was in Chicago as the first stop on the Army's nationwide tour honoring his heroic actions in combat. He began his trip by braving blizzard conditions and a terrible performance by the Chicago Bears to receive a hero's welcome from more than 62,000 fans at Chicago's Soldier Field. Although he was raised in Iowa, he is a diehard Bears fan and cheered loudly for the Bears despite a disappointing loss.

"Despite the cold weather, Illinois is proud to give SSG Giunta a very warm welcome," said Major General William L. Enyart, the 37th Adjutant General of the State of Illinois, who spoke at the National Guard ceremony.

When SSG Giunta and the official party for the ceremony arrived, hundreds of flashbulbs went off and the crowd rose to its feet for a standing ovation. Many in the crowd were moved to tears to be in his presence. Despite this rock star reception, SSG Giunta was quick to point out that "even though the focus has been on me quite a bit lately, I truly am just one of many guys who serve our country every day."

"All of us need to remind Americans of the great sacrifice that the men and women in uniform make so that we can have our freedom," SSG Giunta told the crowd. "I am most proud of the fact that I was able to serve alongside some incredible soldiers. They really are the heroes."

Also present and recognized at the ceremony were Sharon Helman, Hines Director, Dan Grant, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Illinois Congressman Daniel Lipinski and hundreds of area Veterans and Veterans Service Organizations.

Keely Moran, a blind rehabilitation specialist in the Hines Blind Center, was among the hospital staff who got to meet SSG Giunta and shake his hand. As the wife of a Marine, Moran was especially moved by the Veterans in the crowd and their reaction to this hero.

"It was a great experience," Moran said. "I walked one of our Desert Storm Veterans up to meet SSG Giunta and they ended up having a private and very emotional conversation. It was very heartwarming to see how he connected on a personal level with our Veterans."

Director Helman agreed. "Meeting SSG Giunta was one of the highlights of my career," she said. "He was very humble and made such a point of taking the time to meet and speak with all of the Veterans in the crowd. He makes me proud to be an American and even prouder to be in a profession that is dedicated to serving our nation's heroes."

Network News

Hines

Family Empowerment Network (FEN)

Taking care of loved ones is an intense labor of love for the families of many of our nation's Veterans. To assist and support these selfless caretakers, Hines created a Family Empowerment Network (FEN). FEN sponsors educational seminars and support group meetings for families and friends of Veterans who often find themselves in the caregiving role.

"We are committed to supporting caregivers of Veterans from all eras," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "These special individuals are our partners in Veteran health care, meeting the needs of the most severely injured and chronically ill Veterans on a daily basis."

The FEN program was developed by members of the hospital's TBI/Polytrauma Team. Currently, it consists of four quarterly educational and supportive sessions per year aimed at adult caregivers and family members of OEF/OIF and TBI/Polytrauma Veterans, but all Veterans and their families are invited.

"The FEN provides a safe environment for family members to voice their concerns, discuss personal experiences, learn about their loved one's condition, and seek answers to tough questions," said Rene Pichler-Mowry, PhD, Clinical Psychologist on the Hines TBI/Polytrauma Team. Topics at the educational sessions include PTSD, relationships, pain, and more.

This fall, the Hines FEN sponsored a family fun day in the hospital auditorium. The day offered families of severely-injured Veterans an opportunity to come together and learn about some of the services VA has to offer and meet some other families that are going through similar experiences.



Nancy Berard, from Hines Nutrition and Food Service, helped children at the Family Fun Day learn about nutrition by planning a Spin the Wheel Game at the Family Empowerment Network's Family Fun Day.

"Knowing that other families are going through the same thing was very helpful to me," said the wife of a Veteran who attended the family fun day. "I also learned about some of the benefits that are available through the VA for family members who care for Veterans."

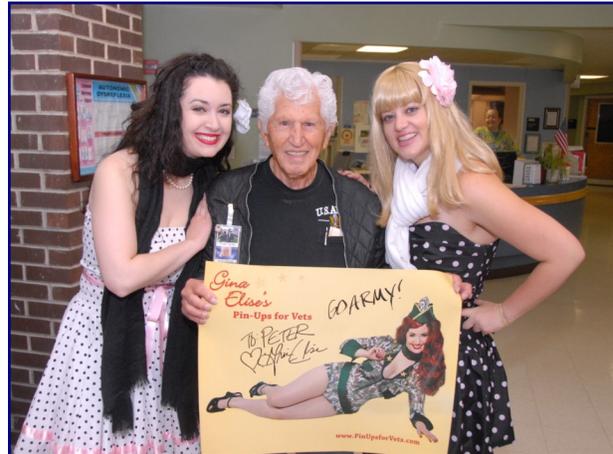
Many of the activities at the Hines Family Fun Day were geared toward children, with Chicago White Sox mascot Southpaw making an appearance and Hines staff stepping up to offer pumpkin decorating, games and prizes for kids of all ages. The day offered everything from information on nutrition to VA eligibility assistance.

Like other VA facilities, Hines is proud to offer respite care to provide caregivers times of relief and training to enhance their caregiver skills. One Hines patient, who has been married for 58 years, was diagnosed with Parkinsons several years ago. His wife, who is his primary caregiver, is committed to keeping the Veteran in the home as long as possible. They first used the respite program when the wife was scheduled for a surgery of her own. Since that time, the couple has continued to utilize the respite benefits twice a year. This has allowed the wife the chance to take a vacation with girlfriends and take time for herself. The Veteran also enjoys coming to the Hospital during these visits, and interacting with other Veterans and participating in the recreation activities, like Bingo.

"Taking care of our patients' families is a very important part of treating our Veterans," said Jillian Inserra, Hines Caregiver Support Coordinator. "After

all, families are on the front line with their loved ones every day. We do anything and everything we can to support and help them along the way."

PinUps for Vets



Gina Elise (left) and Leah Adams, from PinUps for Vets, visited the Hines Residential Care Facility in November to deliver special t-shirts, posters and calendars to happy Veterans like Peter Poulous. Elise began the PinUps for Vets organization and has delivered thousands of "Pin-ups for Vets" calendars to hospital patients and donated more than \$50,000 to VA hospitals nationwide.

New LaSalle Clinic Opens for Veterans



More than 200 area Veterans were present when Hines opened the new 9,600 square foot Veterans Clinic location in LaSalle County in October.

The new location, which is only a few miles from and three times the size of the old clinic location in LaSalle, offers Veterans new and expanded services and state-of-the-art medical equipment in a much more modern environment.”

“Facilities like the LaSalle Clinic allow us to go out in the community and bring our health care services directly to our nation’s heroes,” Sharon Helman, Hospital Director said at the clinic ribbon cutting. “It truly is an honor and a privilege for us to serve these Veterans, who have fought for our freedom and in many cases made incredible sacrifices in the name of our country. We are proud to be able to provide them this modern and spacious clinic in order to receive our top quality health care.”

The new clinic offers LaSalle County Veterans a full range of outpatient services. Veterans on hand for the opening were thrilled with the new clinic. “This new clinic is so impressive,” said David Durham, a retired Marine Corps Sergeant from Peru, Illinois. “Opening this new clinic shows us that the VA has not forgotten about the Veterans out here in the rural areas. These guys served their country and I am so glad they can come to this beautiful location when they need healthcare.”



Two LaSalle Clinic patients Johnnie and Lyle King, participated in the new LaSalle CBOC ribbon cutting by leading the pledge of allegiance. Mr. and Mrs. King both served their county in World War II; Mrs. King as a Navy Nurse and Mr. King as an airman in the Air Force. They met while in uniform, have been married for 64 years and were thrilled to participate in the ceremony.

Congresswoman Debbie Halverson and Dan Grant, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, along with the mayors of both LaSalle and Peru, Illinois also participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Hines has operated a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in LaSalle since 1998. The clinic has consistently grown and now sees approximately 3,300 patients per year. VA estimates that there are more than 18,000 Veterans residing in the catchment area of the clinic. The new clinic will allow Hines to meet the projected future VA enrollment of the area and will improve access and convenience for Veterans who would like to take advantage of VA services but may not want drive the 90 miles to Hines.

“What a great day for the VA and a great day for America’s Veterans,” said Director Helman when addressing the crowd at the ribbon cutting. “This gorgeous new clinic symbolizes our commitment to our nation’s heroes. I hope that none of you ever forget that you are in our hearts and minds.”

Wreaths Across America



Denise Ostrowski right, and her teenage son pictured above helped place wreaths at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery.

A group of 20 Hines employees braved the cold weather to participate in “Wreaths Across America” at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in early December.

The Hines Employee Association raised \$1900 to fund wreaths to honor Veterans buried at the National Cemetery.

Iron Mountain

Adopt-a-Family Program

The Adopt-A-Family Program has been very popular with employees, visitors, patients and volunteers of the Oscar G. Johnson Medical Center for the past fourteen years. The program is carried out by the medical center's Equal Employment Opportunity Committee and provides for local families who are experiencing hardships due to medical, economic, and or other unforeseen circumstances.

In 1996, the Iron Mountain VA sponsored the first facility-wide Adopt-A-Family event. Since the program began, over 100 local families have received help for the holidays through generous donations from everyone involved. Employees of the medical center also assist with deliveries to the family's homes.

Fireplace hearth displays and a holiday tree located throughout the medical center are decorated with tags listing items of need for the families. Contributors are given the opportunity to choose a tag from the displays. Numerous wrapped gifts, toys, food items, gift cards, and miscellaneous items are now being collected and will be delivered to the families before the holidays.



(Left to Right): Angela Finley, Rita Rosen and Becky Shimanek - Oscar G. Johnson Medical Center staff and coordinators of the Adopt-A-Family project.

Beautiful New Campus

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center completed three landscaping projects just as winter was arriving. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the photos of the new, improved campus are priceless.



The main Entrance project (left) included the installation of new side-walks, foliage and site furnishings as well as improvements by the flag

circle to include a seat wall development and benches. Service flags were installed with lights as well as new lights for the U.S. flagpole. New foliage was planted in areas adjacent to the entry circle drive and the main entrance.



A therapeutic garden area was created outside the Community Living Center (CLC) which includes various types of foliage as well as elevated plant-

ing beds for the CLC residents. The park-like setting also includes a new pavilion and pathways. A service monument was recently relocated from the city courthouse and placed in the garden area adjacent to the pavilion.

The courtyard flanking the CLC was upgraded to include a water fountain, various plantings, and benches. This area will be available to the patients throughout the year with quick and easy access from the CLC.



Veteran's War Memorial Dedication Ceremony

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center hosted a ribbon cutting event on Wednesday, November 10, 2010 for the dedication of a Veteran's war memorial that was recently relocated to the medical center from the Dickinson County Courthouse.



The Dickinson County Department of Veterans Affairs originally dedicated (above) this war memorial monument to Dickinson County in 1989, but in recent years, local Veteran organizations felt that it should be moved to the VA medical center where it could be enjoyed by more Veterans.

The medical center was approached earlier this year about possibly relocating the war memorial monument to the campus and management gladly accepted the suggestion and several months later, the relocation came to fruition and in late October 2010, the monument was successfully moved.

Veterans, staff, volunteers and the community were invited to attend the dedication ceremony which was held outside in the new park on the west side of the main building. The weather cooperated with temperatures in the 50's, sunny skies, and a light breeze. Those in attendance not only enjoyed the nice weather but also the festivities which included an Honor Guard, the Dickinson County Commissioner who was the guest speaker, words by the Medical Center Director, several other speakers, a ribbon cutting event and refreshments.

Jesse Brown

Reaching Out to Our Newest Veterans

VISN 12 has one of the highest utilization rates of OEF/OIF Veterans in VA. Approximately 64 percent of OEF/OIF Veterans in our Network service area have sought care at VA and the percentage is even higher for women Veterans.

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center (JBVAMC) continues to develop new programs to reach out to and support this specific group of Veterans. Last year it opened a one-stop-shop OEF/OIF Welcome Home suite that offers a full variety of medical, mental health and community re-integration resources in a family-friendly environment. It has been hailed as a "Best Practice."



JBVAMC's OEF/OIF Team continues to present a live interactive call-in program on Cable Access Channel 21, which is offered by the Comcast, RCI and WOW cable stations in Chicago. The show's host is the medical center's OEF/OIF Outreach Coordinator, Dr. Eric Proescher, and the program is held on the 4th Thursday of every month from 6:30 to 7 p.m. Topics last year included Women's Health, Veterans Benefits, PTSD, TBI, Suicide Prevention and Art Therapy.

The medical center holds Veterans Focus Groups each month and, based upon needs identified by patient, the OEF/OIF Team is working with JBVAMC's Alcohol Treatment Program to develop a 12-step AA program for OEF/OIF Veterans. It is also promoting medical center services by establishing social media accounts, including Facebook and Twitter.

Staff Satisfaction on the Rise

Jesse Brown VAMC continues to be one of the VA leaders nationwide in its response rate for the VA All Employee Survey (AES). In 2010, JBVAMC led the VISN with a participation rate of 90 percent, up from 85 percent the previous year. But the real story is what JBVAMC is doing with the survey results.

Overall staff satisfaction, as reflected by the survey, is very high – at or near the highest scores in many areas nationwide. More importantly, these scores have risen each year the survey has been offered as JBVAMC continues to develop action strategies to address employee issues with the lowest scores.



Employees attending JBVAMC's annual Employee Recognition Picnic in September are greeted by Dr. Wendy Brown, Chief of Staff (standing). Employees are encouraged to dress casually on that day and are served by chiefs and supervisors.

For example, previous surveys showed lower-than-average scores in the areas of working conditions, promotional opportunities, recognition, supervisory support, employee development and co-worker support. A number of initiatives were developed over the past several years to address concerns in those areas:

- The Employee Point Recognition Program provides a manner in which employees can recognize their own personal and professional development, along with their contributions to the medical center's mission. Last year, almost 1,700 JBVAMC employees participated in that program.

- The Employee Personal and Professional Development and School at Work programs were offered for staff who wished to enhance their career opportunities but were not eligible for the Facility Leadership Development or VISN Leadership Development programs.

- A comprehensive employee wellness program was initiated, including an expansion of the Fitness Center; weight loss and walking challenges; aerobic exercise classes centering on abdominal work and kickboxing; and dance classes, including Zumba (based on Latin Dance Rhythms) and line dancing. Meditation classes for staff are also offered weekly in the medical center's Chapel.

- Implementation of a Buddy Program to pair up new employees with seasoned staff. Monthly New Employee Focus Groups are also held that provide the medical center with a "fresh eyes" perspective from staff employed at JBVAMC for less than one year.

- Expanded mandatory supervisory training, with an emphasis on employee rounding and support and recognition of staff.

In addition, each service with scores that fall below the medical center's median average are asked to develop action plans to address employee concerns. Scores and rankings by service are prominently displayed for staff to view.

JBVAMC's AES Scores have jumped significantly over the previous three years and even its lowest scores are higher than average nationwide. Why is this important? Research has shown that higher scores are correlated with better employee outcomes, including lower rates of sick leave, fewer EEO complaints and greater civility among coworkers; as well as better performance outcomes, higher Joint Commission scores and higher quality chronic disease and preventive care.

Higher scores also highlight JBVAMC's success in meeting its goal of being an Employer of Choice.

Free Valentines for Veterans Concert to Feature the Chi-Lites

The national “Valentines for Veterans” concert series returns to Chicago on Saturday, February 12, with The Chi-Lites performing a free concert for Veterans, military members and their guests at the UIC Forum, beginning at 3 p.m.

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

Since 2007, “Valentines for Veterans” concerts featuring soul legends like The Platters and The Spinners have been held in 11 U.S. cities to thank Veterans and military members for their service and sacrifices. The series is part of the annual National Salute to Veteran Patients, which is celebrated at VA medical facilities nationwide during the week of Valentine’s Day to pay tribute to America’s Veterans and encourage citizens to become involved as VA volunteers.

Each Veteran or military member is limited to two free tickets while supplies last. Please contact the Voluntary Service offices at Jesse Brown VAMC (312-569-6109); Edward Hines, Jr. VAH (708-202-2523); or Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (847-688-3139) in early January for ticket and other information. Parking rates at the UIC Forum have been reduced to \$5 for this event.

On the day of the concert, the doors to the UIC Forum, 725 W. Roosevelt Road in Chicago, will open at 2 p.m. There will be information tables set up in the hall prior to the event and a surprise act will be introduced by The Chi-Lites at the beginning of the show.

The concert is co-sponsored by Hines VAH, Jesse Brown VAMC, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center and Help Hospitalized Veterans, a national non-profit service organization established to distribute free therapeutic arts and crafts kits to patients at VA and military hospitals.

North Chicago (Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center)

Royalty Crowned at Homecoming Dance

With finger-foods, fresh corsages, and new crowns ready for the homecoming court, more than 30 residents from the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center Community Living Center gathered recently for a homecoming dance.

“The air was truly electric with excitement as they ‘twinkled their toes’ to the music,” said Pamela Sanberg, Lovell FHCC Associate Chief Nurse of Geriatrics and Extended Care. “They took out their best clothes and danced the evening away -- it was really a magical night for the residents, staff and volunteers.”



(Far right, foreground) Karen Nelson, Lovell FHCC Volunteer and Libertyville American Legion Auxiliary member, dances with U.S. Army Veteran Arthur Washington.

Although the homecoming participants were well past their high school years, all the excitement and typical fanfare of a school-aged dance were present: wallflowers building courage to ask for a dance, pop music filling the air, and the selection of a homecoming king and queen.





“The whole thing was so exciting, and I was really surprised about being selected as homecoming queen,” said U.S. Army Veteran Adrienne Burke (left). “It was so nice to dress up in a gown and wear a corsage. The night really helped us to forget that we were in a medical center.”

The whole thing was so exciting. It was so much fun, and I can't wait to do it again.” Sanberg noted that many events are planned throughout the year, but the formal dance was clearly a hit among the residents and would be repeated very soon.

Groundbreaking for \$4.7M Green House® Homes

Leadership from the Department of Veterans Affairs were on hand Nov. 9 with project leadership and contractors to break ground on a two-phased project to build six Green House® homes at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center's West Campus in North Chicago, IL.



(From left) Pam Sanberg, William Keane, Capt. David Beardsley, Mary Ann Romeo, Dr. Christa Hojlo, Patrick L. Sullivan, Joe Zimmerman, Jerry Walleck, Dr. Sarah Fouse, Dr. Jan Clarke and World War II Veteran Adriane Burke break ground on Green House® homes.

“Today we're proving what forward-looking initiatives look like by marking a significant milestone in the history of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs, as we become the second VA facility to break ground on a Green House® project,” said Patrick Sullivan, Director; Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center. “So please understand what we're doing today: We're not just building homes. We're building choices for our residents.”

Each home is designed to be nearly 8,500-square-foot, and will provide up to 10 residents their own private bedrooms and bathrooms, along with a community kitchen, dining and living area. Phase I of the project was designed by Perkins-Eastman architecture and are being built by Blue Yonder, Inc.

“I'm proud to be a Veteran. I'm proud of the service to this country. And I'm very proud to be part of this tremendous project,” said Seth Malley, President of Blue Yonder, Inc., who will build the Green House® homes in Phase I.

Green House® homes provide flexibility for residents to choose daily activities, while offering transitional nursing support, as needed. The homes will be part of the Lovell FHCC's Community Living Center, and are a revolutionary departure from traditional nursing and assisted living facilities. Phase I is scheduled to be completed by Spring 2012.

Ribbon Cut on \$5.1M Renovation

With ceremonial scissors in hand, leadership from Veterans Integrated Service Network 12 and the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center joined staff and patients to cut a ribbon for a newly-renovated medical and surgical floor Nov. 16.

“As a Veteran, I take a personal stake in renovations like this,” said Seth Malley, President of Blue Yonder, Inc., the project's general contractor. “We were very excited to renovate this floor at the federal health care center. There were challenges and innovative approaches, but we stayed focused on the goal and are very satisfied with the outcome.”

With 15,800 square feet of space, each large room on the floor offers greater privacy with individual rooms and bathrooms, a state-of-the-art patient lift system, 32-inch LCD televisions and greater ability to accommodate visiting loved ones.

“In our patient-centered environment, it’s so important that family members have the ability to stay with their loved ones during the healing process,” said Mary Ann Allred, Lovell FHCC Nurse Manager. “With their private rooms, there are lower noise levels and a more inviting environment for visitations.”



(From left) James White, CAPT David Beardsley, Mary Ann Allred, Patrick Sullivan, Dr. Paul Morgan, Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky and Seth Malley cut a ribbon at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, opening a newly-renovated medical and surgical floor Nov. 16.

According to Dr. Paul Morgan, Lovell FHCC Director of Inpatient Services, the new floor allows for greater capabilities and telemetry. Additionally, the increase in square footage has allowed for a 28.5-percent increase in patient beds, from 28 to 36 beds.

“In the past, if we had a patient with an acute stroke or syncope (passing out), we had to admit them into the intensive care unit, as that unit was the only location in the facility with telemetry,” said Morgan. “Now, with our increased telemetry, we have a greater number of beds to treat a larger range of patients.”

Madison

Acute Hospice Beds Open

As part of a Comprehensive End-of-Life Care Initiative grant, the Madison VAH Palliative Care Program is proud to announce that three acute care inpatient hospice beds opened on November 17, 2010. The

beds are comprised of three refurbished private rooms that have been designed to be more home-like than traditional hospital rooms. In addition, a family room with generous seating, a small refrigerator, microwave, and television has been added to the unit.

The goal of care is to provide Veterans requiring inpatient end-of-life care and their love ones a comfortable environment in an acute care setting. The physical environment is not the only change that occurred to make this possible. Staff members have received additional End of Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC)-FOR-VETERANS and Pain Resource Professional training with a focus on symptom management, palliative, and end-of-life care. The current Hospice beds are temporarily located on an inpatient unit and will relocate to the Madison VAH Community Living Center that is slated to open in summer 2011.

As the Madison VAH inpatient Hospice Program becomes more settled, the palliative care team will be looking to actively partner with other VISN 12 facilities to share resources and experiences that enhance end-of-life care for Veterans throughout the VISN. The new hospice beds at the Madison VAH are intended to enhance the Veteran-centric care while providing a more comfortable environment for their patients and their families at this critical time.

Rooftop Salute From Construction Workers



working on the site added a message of gratitude to our Veterans.

The message would be there as the morning began and then it became covered up with work supplies during the course of the day. As the day ended, the message is once again viewable.

For the recent months since the roofing panels were put in place on the Community Living Center being built at the Madison VAH, the patients, visitors and staff looking down on the construction site have had an unexpected and patriotic view. The contractors

The contractors continually touch up the message to make sure it is there every day. In addition to this thoughtful message, there are a group of contractors that faced the hospital building each morning and saluted.

These very considerate tributes to our Veterans have been greatly appreciated by all who have viewed them.

Native American Heritage Month



The Madison VAH was proud to host the Ho-Chunk Nation for a Pow Wow in November to celebrate Native American Heritage Month.

Mr. Robert Mann, a Tribal Veterans Service Officer, explained to the audience that a Pow Wow is a social time,

where friends and family get together to sing, dance, and give thanks.

The program began with a grand entry, and then a flag song, where the American and Ho-Chunk flags were raised. Accompanying Mr. Mann were five dancers dressed in beautiful Native American costumes, covered with beading and feathers. There was also a Drum Circle, where men played a large drum and sang.

Mr. Mann, the dancers and singers performed songs and dances for each branch of the military. Veterans who served in each branch were encouraged to participate, and many did. They then performed the Friendship Dance, where all audience members were invited to dance along with the group. The program ended with the retiring of the colors, as well as a brief question and answer session which provided additional insight into the Native American culture.

Milwaukee

Never Under Estimate the Power of the Young

Maybe the best way to make sure Brandon Powers does something is to tell him he can't.

That word is not in his vocabulary.

Powers, a 16-year-old who goes to Whitnall High School, and must use an electric wheelchair because of Muscular Dystrophy, earned his Eagle Scout by planning and building a raised garden and concrete patio at the Zablocki VA's Adult Day Healthcare.



Brandon Powers, seated, shows off his raised garden planter to Lois Hawkins from Adult Day Healthcare, along with Veterans J.W. Jones-Robinson and Don Lutz. Powers, 16, who has Muscular Dystrophy, planned and helped build a concrete patio and flower bed for the Adult Day Healthcare as part of his Eagle Scout project.

Powers purposely wanted to come up with an Eagle Scout project that stood the test of time.

"I didn't want it to be easy. I wanted it to be good. I wanted it to be something people would remember," he said. "I'm just some person in a wheelchair, but that doesn't mean I can't do something."

Powers first had to submit plans to Facility Management and get approval for the project. Once that was done, he got donations, and mobilized a crew of 40 volunteers. They did the brunt of the work over two weekends in October – first leveling the ground, laying concrete and adding decorative bricks.

Then they came back a couple weeks later with the raised stand, filled with mums of all colors. He'll follow up with a donation of gift cards and supplies so the Adult Day Healthcare staff can buy dirt and more flowers.

All told, he put in about 400 hours of work on the project, three times what was necessary for Eagle Scout, said his mom, Yolanda Powers. "I kept asking him if he wanted to do something easier, and he wouldn't hear it," she said. "Even with some delays, he was patient, and stuck with it."

"All of us who come here are working through some sort of trauma or problem, and coming out here to garden is relaxing and helps us," said J.W. Jones-Robinson, who was once an Army airborne ranger.

Freebay

The plastic head lice comb doesn't say much about FreeBay.

But, VA Milwaukee employees like Barbara McLaughlin, a patient services advocate, and Sara Grenzow, a spinal cord injury recreation therapist, do.

Both avid-FreeBayers said the internet-based surplus furniture outlet for employees is convenient, fast and a great way to get office stuff without the hassle of filling out tons of paperwork and waiting forever.

FreeBay might not be eBay, but it has a large – and sometimes interesting – array of supplies that, just like the name implies, is free for the taking.

Everything from plastic head lice combs to bright blue vinyl sofas to your basic office desk can be found on FreeBay. The website is first-come, first-serve and can be found under the quick navigation links on the VA Milwaukee homepage.

"Purchasing new things can be a hassle, with Free Bay it makes it easy to get items we need," Grenzow.

She's used the program to furnish entire rooms in the Spinal Cord Injury Clinic with desks and bookcases.

Paul Knox, an inventory specialist, and David Hill, a supply technician, run FreeBay, which is located in

Building 20. Knox said it started in April 2008 as a way to recycle furniture and supplies. As Materiel Management's inventory of old furniture swelled, so grew their need for a new way to manage excess inventory.



Paul Knox, (above) an inventory specialist, sorts through pictures in FreeBay. Knox started the excess inventory website, coined FreeBay, to find homes for extra VA supplies and equipment.

The program has found new homes for 426 items since its birth, and average 30 new items per month. Any VA employee can log on to the excess inventory website and find office supplies they need — photos and descriptions included.

When you find those plastic head lice combs that you were looking for – and for the record, those are still in their original package and not used -- complete the request form and an e-mail is set directly to Knox.

And just like a pizza place, he offers delivery, and you don't have to tip.

Community Living Center Serves "Real Breakfast of Champions"

Forget the Wheaties, residents of the Community Living Center now have a real breakfast of champions with a lot more options than some crunchy wheat flakes.

The Rehabilitation and Extended Care Community division, along with Nutrition and Food Service, now deliver an array of breakfast options for those who dine at the Veteran's View.

After nearly two years of collaboration and hard work from the Cultural Transformation Steering Committee and the Community Living Center Dining

Committee, the idea of Veterans enjoying a corner café-style of breakfasting has come to fruition. It's all part of an overall effort to make the living and dining experience a more social and engaging event.



Mike Markgraf, (center) a nursing assistant, takes down Jerome Miklaszewicz's order while Nick Massenza catches up on the morning headlines.

Residents of Independence Hall (formerly 9C) and some residents of Valor Point (formerly 9A) can enjoy a morning cup of Joe or various morning beverages served by the attentive staff. As an added bonus for residents, visiting family and friends can also attend. Just like the friendly waiter or waitress at the local restaurant, menus are ready at the table, and staff is able to provide table-side service, which adds to the café ambience.

Members of the Nutrition and Food Service said, as a result, more Veterans are selecting healthier options, such as yogurt and fruit.

Now that pre-portioned trays are no longer distributed, residents can instead enjoy each others' company at a pre-set table featuring china dishes and decorative placemats and napkins. For those who prefer to start the day catching up on the latest headlines while they nosh, newspapers are offered as well.

"With a variety of items offered every day, Veterans are never lacking for choice," said Jean Wroblewski, Nutrition and Food Service program manager. "For those on modified diets, such as cardiac or puree, we've expanded our product choices as well."

Wroblewski said as the program continues to develop, they'll involve the Veterans in meal planning, through surveys and other feedback, with more changes planned my year's end.

Even those content to eat the same thing day after day are selecting other options, and the dietary staff is picking up on the Veterans' preferences.

"They really like having different choices for breakfast instead of seeing the same standard-issue hospital meals. They can also choose what is on their plate, which is a big plus.

Officials said this is just one additional piece of moving cultural transformation forward in Community Living Centers at Zablocki and across the VA. Plans are already in place to address the challenges of the different populations of the residents on Hero's Corner (formerly 8AS) and extend elements of the breakfast service to them as well.

Although some aspects are still being tweaked, service improvements have been made in all areas of the Community Living Center including twice-a-day snack cart deliveries, birthday meals, special monthly meals, fresh bakery items and fruit service to all RECC residents on weekends.

More choice means a reduction in waste, and other benefits, Wroblewski said.

Urgent Care Center

Patients will get faster care and won't be as cramped now that the Zablocki VA has implemented an Urgent Care Clinic.

The new clinic, located near the pharmacy, is an extension of the Emergency Department, said Dr. Ralph Schapira, the medicine division manager for Zablocki.

All Emergency Room patients will still check in there and be triaged by a nursing team. Those not needing immediate, emergency care, will be sent to the Urgent Care Clinic.

In the past, those patients who weren't a top priority in the Emergency Room may have seen wait times from 45 minutes to six hours, as people are treated on a priority basis, said Jeff Barbee, one of the Emergency Room registered nurses who now works in Urgent Care.

“Now, those same patients can be triaged there, then seen and taken care of in a half hour to 45 minutes,” he said. “We’re seeing as many as 25 patients a day in Urgent Care. That frees up more beds in the Emergency Room, so this is going to help everyone.”

In the past, some of those patients who came to the ER may have been taken care of in a primary care clinic, which isn’t ultimately staffed to take drop-ins.

With the new system, which came online in mid October, those needing immediate care – such as heart attack, stroke or infection – will be treated in the ER. The Urgent Care Clinic will take those other cases that aren’t quite an emergency but can’t wait for a primary care appointment. Meanwhile, a mental health crisis intervention unit that used to be located on the sixth floor is now integrated with Urgent Care.

“Those who need immediate mental health and other medical care can now get it in one area and we can be more hands-on with that patient instead of sending them to another floor for some of their treatment and back to the first floor for other treatment,” Schapira said.

Tomah

Better Health Through Awareness

The increase in chronic health problems in America has fueled the need for enhanced technology that monitors a greater number of biometric data and provides valuable information for Veterans and healthcare providers to evaluate the success of their healthcare initiatives.



“It’s important for all of us to take an active role in our personal health,” said Tomah VA Nurse Practitioner Nancy Bauer (right) seen assisting Veteran Ron Maniece.

“This health kiosk can help with awareness. We want to partner with Veterans concerning their health.”

Bauer came across the Life Clinic 500 model Health Kiosk while attending a conference in June and thought it might provide a great benefit to Veterans here at the Tomah VA.

“The kiosk is very easy to use and it’s wheelchair accessible,” said Bauer. “Whether you’re just curious about your body mass index or have been asked by a medical provider to track your blood pressure between appointments, the kiosk is a unique health station for Veterans.”

The Health Kiosk, located in the Patient Education Resource Center (PERC) in the General Library in (Building 401/Room 1100), is capable of measuring blood pressure, pulse rate, body weight, body mass index and blood oxygen as well as downloading readings from glucose meters and pedometers. It also has an interactive touch screen interface that allows Veterans to view, save and print readings or transfer them into another wellness database.

“When taking a blood pressure reading, it even plays classical music,” said Bauer. “That’s kinda neat.”

VA Hosts Open House

Tomah VA Medical Center hosted its first Open House in 63 years on Saturday, September 11, 2010 from 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. “In 2010, we will complete almost \$15 million in construction projects,” said Medical Center Director Jerald D. Molnar, “which will improve the quality of care for our Veterans. We look forward to having the community come out and spend the day with us.”



Physical Therapy Supervisor Shannon Utesch (black shirt background) leads a tour group through the Ability Gym.

During the Open House, Tomah VA employees and volunteers provided guided tours throughout the medical center which included the following destinations:

- New Urgent Care clinic (still under construction-complete July 2011)
- New Medical Imaging clinic (complete-July 2010)
- Hall of Heroes
- Living History in the VA Chapel
- New Rehabilitation clinic (complete-August 2010)
- New Acute and Mental Health Living Quarters BLDG. 403 (complete-Oct 2010)
- The Spirit of Freedom Dining Hall
New VA Mobile Clinic-outside of BLDG. 406

Fencing Provided Additional Security

If you've visited the Tomah VA recently, you have most certainly noticed that some fencing is going up around the perimeter of the facility. Is this a change in mission? Or did we just have some extra money to spend so some decorative fencing might be nice? Well, not exactly.



The fencing (construction started on Monday, October 4) is a Bronze color, 6 feet in height, with gates at all roads and sidewalks along the North side of East Veterans Street. The fence will extend from the Western edge near the VA entrance monument, all the way to the East end of the golf course, and tie into the chain link fencing at

either end. In addition, a purchase order was just approved to replace the entire chain link fencing around 3 sides of the facility as well.

"The perimeter fencing is something that we identified as a need shortly after 9/11/01," said Steve Amling, Emergency Management Coordinator. "Without the fencing and gates, we have no way to control our perimeter and access to our facility."

As a side benefit, the fencing gives the medical center control over egress from the facility as well, which is very beneficial in the case of a missing or wandering patient. When the threat level increases or a disaster occurs in the area, the fencing now provides the means to control who comes onto the facility. The immediate benefit is that it can be used by the VA Police to limit access to the grounds after hours to a single point, and then re-opened in the morning. The fencing is part of \$563,000 in funding the Tomah VA received from VHA for several emergency management projects and equipment. The decorative nature of the fence will serve to enhance the appearance of our facility, rather than create an institutional look. "Yea, and it looks good, too!" said Amling.

A Special Connection

Chances are they never knew each other. Yet on Wednesday, November 10, 2010, three men who chewed some of the same dirt and suffered the same hardships while fighting in two different wars began serving together once again. As long as these walls stand, our 2010 Hall of Heroes inductees, Peter Wirth, Jr. and Leonard Jasinski, will join Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. and the other Hall Of Heroes inductees, to inspire generations of Veterans, employees and volunteers. Besides all three being Marines, the connections between Wirth, Jasinski and Red Cloud are uncanny to say the least.



It starts with Mitchell Red Cloud (*left*), a Ho-Chunk Native American. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served with the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion on Guadalacanal. After refusing discharge as a result of contracting malaria and other tropical diseases, Red Cloud was assigned to the 6th Marine Division.

In 1945, he was wounded and received a Purple Heart ----on the island of Okinawa.

After WWII ended, Mitchell Red Cloud Jr. spent the next two years visiting relatives. In 1948, he enlisted into the United States Army and was sent to Japan. On July 3, 1950, two weeks after the North Koreans invaded the South, he was sent to Korea with the 24th Infantry Division. On the night of November 5, 1950, Chinese Communist Forces attacked United Nations Forces. Corporal Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. was at his guard post when 1,000 Chinese attacked his company. He was wounded, yet pulled himself to his feet," the citation continues, "and wrapping his arm around a tree, continued his deadly fire again, until he was fatally wounded." Under his covering fire, the rest of E Company began a fighting retreat from the hilltop to fortified positions 1,000 yards south. Red Cloud was reportedly struck by as many as eight bullets before dying. For his extraordinary heroism, Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. would receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions----**In North Korea.**

The first inductee into the Tomah VA Hall of Heroes for 2010, **Peter Wirth Jr.**, was an 18 year old Marine when on June 2, 1945, he participated in actions that would result in receipt of the Navy Cross—second only to the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism. Later on June 18, 1945, Mr. Wirth was wounded and would receive the Purple Heart for his own actions----**on the island of Okinawa.**



for his actions---**In North Korea.**

The second inductee into the Tomah VA Hall of Heroes for 2010, **Leonard Jasinski**, was serving with the 1st Marine Division when on November 2, 1950; he was wounded on the arm and the leg while providing fire support against an enemy position. He was awarded a Bronze Star with a Gold Star and a Purple Heart

The connection of these three men doesn't end with their war-time service. In October 1950, Mr. Jasinski had been awarded a Bronze Star for heroic achievement near Uijongbu, South Korea. Camp Red Cloud, in Uijongbu, was later dedicated in honor of Mitchell Red Cloud Jr. on Armed Forces Day, May 18, 1957. And finally, Mr. Dennis Beattie, inducted Peter Wirth Jr. into the Hall of Heroes. He is the Junior Vice Commander of the Mitchell Red Cloud Marine Corps League detachment in Black River Fall, WI. Red Cloud was inducted into the Tomah VA Hall of Heroes on November 10, 2006. They now serve together once again for all of us in mind, body and spirit.

Veterans Day Highlights

Hines employees like to say that every day is Veterans Day at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital. This year, the hospital took its Veterans Day celebration to new levels. The hospital kicked off the month with an incredible display of photography taken by military photographers on the ground in Vietnam. The photos, which were displayed in the hospital auditorium for all Veterans and employees to see, were visual depictions of some incredible moments in military history and really geared the hospital up for its two-week long celebration of Veterans Day.

The Hospital displayed a huge banner in the front lobby throughout the month of November thanking Veterans for their service. More than 500 Hines employees took time to sign the banner, adding their personal message of thanks to our nation's heroes for all visitors and Veterans to see. Voluntary Service then distributed Hines baseball caps (featuring the hospital's new logo and slogan) to all inpatients and sponsored a popcorn sale in the lobby to benefit youth volunteers.

Next on the Veterans Day agenda was a very special event sponsored by two grateful Hines patients. Diane and Roger Ahrens made three patriotic cakes and spent a day handing out more than 1200 pieces of cake to Veterans and staff at Hines in honor of Veterans Day.

The Ahrens, owners of Piece-A-Cake Bakery, are Marine Corps Veterans who participated in the TLC Ultimate Cake Bake Off last year. “We made the cakes to thank our fellow Veterans for their service but also to thank the staff at Hines for all they do for Veterans every day,” said Diane Ahrens.

Finally, the Hines Veterans Day celebration culminated in a special ceremony to honor Veterans who are also employees at Hines. Hundreds of employee Veterans crowded into the Auditorium to hear a special thank you from Hines Director Sharon Helman and receive individual certificates and special Hines coins in honor of their military service. Members of each military service posed for group photos, along with their service flag.



Hines employees who are Veterans of the U.S. Army emptied the audience to pose for a picture with the Army flag during the hospital's Veterans Day Celebration.

“Veterans Day is such a special day for all of us in the VA,” said Director Helman. “The ceremony we had for our employees who are Veterans was very moving. It was great to see all our Veterans gather to celebrate their service and be recognized not only as Veterans but as employees.”

On Veterans Day, Director Helman and two Hines Blind Center patients were interviewed by WGN radio. The interviews, which focused on what Veterans Day means to each of them, played throughout the day.



At the **Jesse Brown** VA Medical Center over 150 Veterans and other guests attended the Veterans Day program on November 11.



The keynote speaker was Chaplain Lt. Colonel Garry Losey, (above) who served as the second-in-command Chaplain for Operation Iraqi Freedom before completing his deployment in September. Chaplain Losey discussed his experiences in Iraq and used the biblical verse Isaiah 6:8 (“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”) as a metaphor for the willingness of the men and women in the U.S. military to step forward and fight our Nation’s battles.



Rick Olson (left) and Gabriel Spataro of the Blinded Veterans Association (accompanied by Olson’s service dog, Verna) presented the Wreath of Remembrance during JBVAMC’s Veterans Day program.



Members of the Marine Corps and Marine Corps League (above) visited the patients at the **Madison** VA in honor of Veterans Day. Prior to their visitation at the patient bedsides, the members performed the traditional cake-cutting ceremony with a sword in the Main Entrance Lobby in honor of the Marine Corps birthday, which was November 10th.

On Veterans Day, a group of women from the Stoughton-area distributed quilts to the **Madison** VAH inpatients. This has become an annual activity for the group, Quilting by the River Friends, which was started eight years ago.



Robert McDowell of Waupun, WI, was delighted with the quilt he received from Alice Asleson.

The women hold workdays throughout the year to work on the quilts as a group as well as working on the quilts individually. A local church group also provided some of the quilts.

The quilts are exceptionally made and were on display at the Quilt Expo in Madison in September and at the American Legion in Stoughton.

The Veterans were delighted to receive the quilts and heartfelt appreciation of the quilters for their service to our country.



Employees, family members and friends from Harley-Davidson filled the **Zablocki** VA (**Milwaukee**) parking lot Nov. 13, to hand out gifts to Veterans, but there was no rumble from bikes.

Most came in cars, but the loud pipe noise came from the replica 1936 Knuckle-head motorcycles in a snow globe with chrome base. With a flick of the "on" switch, each bike swirled

around and made genuine Harley bike noise.

The Harley crew donated and delivered the snow globes as a Veterans Day gift to every hospitalized Veteran in the medical center and domiciliary.

The Harley-Davidson Foundation has previously donated \$1 million over the last five years to Disabled American Veterans transportation program that brings Veterans to their appointments at VA Medical Centers across the country. They also sponsored the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Milwaukee.

POW-MIA Recognition Day



The national POW/MIA Recognition Day, was celebrated at all of our VA facilities in September.

The event honored all Americans who are former Prisoners of War (POW), those who are Missing in Action (MIA), and their families.

Iron Mountain local POWs who were in attendance received a commemorative POW/MIA coin as well as honorary recognition for their sacrifices.

VA staff, volunteers, patients and the community was invited to the event and the warm, sunny autumn weather welcomed approximately 100 guests.



The event-filled celebration included a Parade of Bikes by the Patriot Guard Riders, a fly-over of a C130 by the Minneapolis U.S. Air Force Reserve, Presentation and Retirement of Colors by the American Legion Post #50, and music by the Kingsford High School Concert Chorale. The hour

long celebration was followed by a delicious luncheon.

At **Tomah** VAH, Mark Johnson, head coach of the University of Wisconsin Women's Hockey team and 1980 US Olympian spoke at the Tomah VA Medical Center on Friday, September 17, 2010. He played in 669 NHL Hockey games from 1980-1989 after leading the United States Men's Hockey team to a Gold Medal in the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid, NY. Johnson scored two goals in the most famous hockey game ever played when Team USA defeated the Russians 4-3 on February 22, 1980. 2010 is the 30th anniversary of that victory.



US Olympian Mark Johnson shares a moment with 2006 Tomah VA Hall of Heroes and WWII Veteran Henry Weinberger.

"Being here today was very humbling," said Johnson. "I'm going to take back some of the experiences I've had today and share them with my team." Johnson spoke to a capacity audience about the three

principles of life (Commitment, Integrity, and Charity) that his father "Badger" Bob Johnson and former US Olympic Coach Herb Brooks taught their players. The ceremony took place in the VA Chapel. After signing a few autographs, Johnson took a tour of the new Ability Gym, a \$1.6 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act project completed on September 11. Throughout his walking tour of the facility, Veterans, employees and visitors came up to him and said..."I remember exactly where I was when you won the Gold." "It's amazing after all these years how many lives we have touched," said Johnson. "It's much more special now than it was then."

Special Homeless Stand Down Event

Over 700 Chicago-area Veterans received food, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of necessary services, such as housing, employment and substance abuse treatment at a special Homeless Stand Down event on November 9th. Hines VA Hospital, Jesse Brown VAMC, the Oak Park Vet Center and a variety of community partners hosted the Chicago Area Winter Stand Down for homeless Veterans at the General Jones Armory in Chicago.

"Stand Down" is military terminology referring to the brief period of time a soldier leaves an active combat area in order to rest and regain strength. The Chicago Area Stand Down brought a wide range of specialized resources together to provide homeless Veterans in the Chicago area with comprehensive medical and psychosocial services. Hines employees donated hundreds of winter clothing items for the clothing room at the Stand Down and were dedicated volunteers at the event.

"Reaching out to America's heroes who have served our country and are now struggling with homelessness is a top priority for the Hines VA Hospital," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "The VA is here for these Veterans. Events like this are a great way for us to go out to them and link them up with the benefits and services that they have earned through their military service."

JBVAMC's Voluntary Service coordinated the distribution of used clothing and flu shots, and brought in Chicago Bears cornerback Zachary Bowman to help serve barbecued chicken and ribs to attending Veterans.

"It is extremely gratifying to see how many people and organizations within the community turned out to support our Veterans," said Dr. Wendy Brown, who was serving as JBVAMC's Acting Director at the time. "We had more support this year for our Winter Stand Down than ever before and we provided an important service in preparing our homeless Veterans to cope with the long winter months."



Hines and Jesse Brown volunteers worked together to assist Veterans at Chicago's Winter Stand Down this November.

Stand Downs are one part of the VA's efforts to provide services to homeless Veterans. Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies, and community agencies who serve the homeless.

The Chicago Stand Down offered Veterans an opportunity to connect with VA medical services, Veteran Service Organizations, VA Regional Office, and programs specific to women and Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans.

It was also an opportunity for all Veterans to receive information specific to VA services and community resources.

"I was a Marine for 15 years," said Paul Corrine, a Veteran who was in attendance at the Stand Down with his 15 year old son. "I am just learning about what the VA is all about today. I can't tell you how thankful I am to find out that there is help for me."

Tomah VA Veteran Fired the First American Shot at Pearl Harbor



At 6:37 a.m., on the morning of December 7, 1941, the USS Ward sank a Japanese midget submarine and fired the first American shots of World War II. Veteran Will Lehner, (*above with hat*) from Stevens Point, WI, a patient at both the Tomah VA Medical Center and the Wisconsin Rapids Community Based Outpatient Clinic, was aboard the *Ward* patrolling Pearl Harbor. "Someone spotted a periscope in restricted waters," said Lehner. "Initially, we thought it was a buoy."

The crew, guns loaded, remained ready at General Quarters when the new skipper, W.W. Outerbridge, gave the order to fire. The first gun missed. Then Number Three gun fired. "I saw it hit the sub," said Lehner. "It was so close to us, I thought it was going to hit our ship."



A photo of the hole in the conning tower right where the crew of the USS Ward said it was.

The formal Japanese attack began an hour later. The *Ward* survived the day; however, her combat life would last exactly three years. On the morning of December 7, 1944, the *Ward* was part of a task force landing troops at Ormoc Bay in the Philippines .

At 9:55 a.m., a Japanese kamikaze dove on the *Ward*. "I thought it would crash into the deck, killing us all," said Lehner. "But this one wanted to sink us instead, so it hit us right at the waterline." The initial explosion started fires in the boiler room and the empty troop compartment. Within minutes, the ship lost all power. Black smoke poured from the ship.



Will Lehner (far left) sits on the deck of the control ship Ka'imikai-o-kanaloa with USS Ward crewman Russell Reetz and Keichi Dewaa, a member of the Japanese Imperial Navy, during a break in the 2002 research mission. Dewaa served on a larger submarine during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

At 10:24 a.m. the current Captain, Richard Farwell, gave the order to "to abandon ship." Lehner fought the fire to the end. Incredibly, not a single crew member was killed. Farwell was taken to a nearby ship, the *O'Brien*, where he was stunned to meet the *O'Brien's* Captain, none other than W.W. Outerbridge, the USS *Ward's* first commanding officer on December 7, 1941.

Farwell advised Outerbridge that he was uncertain of the flooding of the ammunition on the *Ward*. Outerbridge immediately requested instructions. A short response soon came from Admiral Struble, "Sink by gunfire." "Can you imagine?" said Lehner. "This was the man's first command and now he was being ordered to sink his ship three years later.

"Outerbridge collected himself and ordered the *O'Brien* to "Fire!" The *Ward* slipped beneath the waves at 11:25 a.m. while the crew watched from other ships. "It was my home for four years," said Lehner. "It was very painful to watch her go down."



The Japanese midget submarine 1200 feet below sea level at Pearl Harbor with both torpedoes still in place.

The story of the USS *Ward* doesn't end with her sinking on December 7, 1944. For 61 years, skeptics expressed doubts over the *Ward's* claim that she sank a Japanese midget submarine. There was no corroborating evidence.

Finally in 2002, an underwater research vehicle from the Hawaii Undersea Research Lab discovered a midget submarine on the ocean floor near the location of the *Ward's* encounter. The sub had a hole in the conning tower exactly where the crew said it was. Tomah VA Veteran Will Lehner was on that underwater research vehicle in 2002. "It was amazing," he said. "For years no one believed us. Now the rest of the world would know."

Awards and Recognition

Patriotic Employer Award



Mireya Guerrero, (right) a Nurse Manager in the **Hines Community Living Center**, received a very special Patriotic Employer Award in recognition of her extraordinary support of one of her employees who is in the Navy Reserve.

This award publicly recognizes employers who provide patriotic support and cooperation to their employees who have answered the nation's call to serve. Mireya, who is a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force, was presented with the award by Terry McCollom, Vice-Chairman of the Illinois Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) in a surprise ceremony at Hines. She was nominated for the award by a former employee who serves in the Navy.

U. P. Recycler of the Year Award



The Upper Peninsula Recycling Coalition recognizes businesses, organizations, and individuals for innovative recycling, composting, and waste reduction throughout the U.P. In 2010, the **Oscar G. Johnson** VA Medical Center was the recipient of the 2010 U.P. Recycler of the Year award for the organization category due to the outstanding achievements of their Green Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) Committee.

The GEMS Committee separated into several smaller groups to focus their efforts more efficiently on identified key areas for improvement to include GEMS Education, Xylene Recycling, Regulated Medical Waste Reduction, Facility Recycling Program, Affirmative Procurement, and Construction Demolition Debris Recycling/Waste Minimization. Through these team efforts and strategic planning, the facility was able to significantly reduce waste and create revenue.

This U.P. Recycler of the Year award not only recognizes their outstanding achievements in resource recovery in the U.P. but more importantly, as a federal medical care facility. As Erin Mundy, RDMS,

RT of the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center so eloquently noted, "The GEMS Committee is helping to preserve our resources for those who have preserved our freedom."

Spotlight Award

The Dickinson-Iron Great Start Collaborative is proud to announce that the **Oscar G. Johnson** VA Medical Center was selected as the October 2010 Spotlight Award winner.

Great Start coordinates systems of community resources in support of families. The collaborative joins together with parents, school staff, and community leaders to create opportunities that increase school readiness. This award recognizes businesses and organizations that are children and family friendly. For example, the medical center has created a family lounge so that families have a "child friendly" environment to relax in while waiting for loved ones. The family lounge has a section geared toward young children with activities and toys, a private restroom, couches, and television.



Photo Caption (Left to Right): Allen R. Ackers, Acting Medical Center Director, Sarah Scullon, child artist, and Mary Bertucci, VA social worker.

Featured on the Great Start Award plaque is a drawing by five year old Sarah Scullon, daughter of employee Sue Scullon, RN. Congratulations to Mary Bertucci and all the other staff who have contributed to the new VA approach to better serve our Veterans. The VA commitment does not stop with the ex-soldier but continues to the caregivers and families.

VAH Physician Receive Award

Five physicians recently received awards at the University of Wisconsin Department of Medicine Dinner and Awards Ceremony. The recipients were: **Dr. Alan Bridges**, Chief of Staff, the Grossman Professionalism Award. This honor is awarded to a Medicine physician who displays the highest standards of professionalism and compassion in the mission of patient care and represents the Department with energy, honor and humility.

Dr. David Meyers, Chief Hospitalist, the Evans-Glassroth Teaching Award for excelling in educating residents and fellows in an acute care setting.

Dr. Cynthia Carlsson, Physician-GRECC, the Graham-Meyer Teaching Award for excelling in educating residents and fellows in an ambulatory setting.

Dr. Nasia Safdar, Physician-Infectious Disease, and **Dr. Sameer Mathur**, Physician-Allergy and Immunology, the Puestow Research Award for making significant research contributions toward advancing the field of medicine.

Employment Champion

The 4th Annual Project SEARCH International Conference recently named the **Madison** VAH as an Employment Champion. The hospital was recognized for finding paid employment for 100 percent of its Project SEARCH interns.

Project SEARCH provides job training for individuals with significant disabilities. The Madison VAH became the first VA facility to begin a Project SEARCH Program in 2008. Currently they have interns of the program working in the Medical Library, Ambulatory Care, Mental Health Clinic, Materials Management, Anticoagulation Clinic, Nutrition & Food Serves, Inpatient Pharmacy, several Primary Care Clinics, SPD/Central Sterilization and the Patient Education Resource Center. The staff greatly enjoys the students and all their efforts.



Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Theodore Goodfriend, Associate Chief of Staff for Research at the Madison VAH, has received the 2010 Irvine Page-Alva Bradley Lifetime Achievement Award in Hypertension. The award is sponsored by the American Heart Association's Council for High Blood Pressure Research. The award is presented annually to an individual who has shown a lifetime of outstanding achievements in the field of hypertension and has served as a role model through service, research, teaching and training.

Farewell and Welcome

Thirty Plus Years of Service

David M. Keough, CFO VISN 12, retired December 3, 2010 with 30 years VA service and 5 years in the Air Force.



Jeffrey Murawsky, M.D., Network Director (left) presents David Keough a Certificate of Appreciation

Dave began his VA career as a GS-4 Accounting Technician in October 1980 at VA Milwaukee. He completed the Accountant Trainee Program at VA Milwaukee in December 1985. He served as Milwaukee's Cost Accountant and CDR Coordinator from December 1985 to July 1990. Then in July 1990, he transferred to VA Cleveland as the Assistant Chief of Fiscal Service.

In April 1992, he was selected for the position of Chief, Fiscal Service at VA Chicago Lakeside. Then in July 1996, was selected for the position of Chief, Fiscal Service at VA Cleveland.

In September 1996, he was selected for membership on the National Financial Management Advisory Council (aka FMAC) and served three years.

In October 1998, Dave was selected for the Financial Manager in the Northern Tier of VISN 12, located in Milwaukee, WI. In this position, he was responsible for implementing a Business Office Plan. This Plan included the integration of 4 fiscal services [Iron Mountain, MI; Madison, WI; Milwaukee, WI; and Tomah, WI] into one Service Line.

In May 2000, Dave was appointed the Acting Financial Manager for the Southern Tier of VISN 12 (Chicago, IL, Hines, IL and North Chicago, IL). In this capacity, he helped VA Chicago and VA Hines complete their FY00 Closeout Process. In September 2000, proposed to the Network CFO and Business Office Director, a plan for having one Fiscal Service Line (aka Product Line) in VISN 12. Starting in October 2000, Dave managed the Great Lakes Finance Service (GLFS) as a VISN 12 Product Line.

In April 2004, Dave was selected as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for VISN 12. In addition to the VISN CFO duties, he continued to serve as the Service Line Manager for the GLFS.

In August, 2005, Dave was designated the VA co-chair for the Finance Task Group (FTG) associated with the integration of VA and DoD at North Chicago. His assignment was completed in October, 2010.

Dave plans to enjoy his retirement with his wife Mary, start an exercise program and fix his golf game, which he feels is currently broken.

VISN 12 Welcomes a New Chief Medical Officer

Michael Bonner, M.D., joined the VISN Office staff on December 5th as the Chief Medical Officer. In this role, he is responsible for oversight of clinical operations of seven medical centers and numerous outpatient clinics in a Network

Dr. Bonner joined the VA in 1999 serving in a variety of roles from Internal Medicine Clerkship Director to Acting Program Manager for Primary



Medical College of Wisconsin.

He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and received his Doctor of Medicine from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in 1994. He completed an internal medicine residency at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts and served as a clinical fellow of Harvard Medical School. He is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and maintains a clinical practice at the Milwaukee VA Hospital, where in 2008 he earned the Best Teacher – Ambulatory award from the medical residents of the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Care at three network medical centers including Jesse Brown VA, Hines VA and Milwaukee VA. Dr. Bonner is currently an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the

A Very Heart Warming Story



By all accounts, Don and Grace Rytman have been together the better part of 70 years. "It's been a real long time," Don said. "We knew each other in kindergarten."

The two celebrated First Communion together a couple years later, and by the time high school came around, it was time to cement the relationship. "We just get along," Don mused. "We were homecoming king and queen. "But only because that's the way Grace wanted it.

"This is how it worked. I was homecoming queen. And because I was voted queen, I got to pick my king, and I picked him," she smiled. "He had other girlfriends in high school, but he always made my

heart go.” She stops for a moment and parts her chest. Thump-Thump-Thump! “He still does,” she added as a couple tears filled her eyes. “It’s his morals, his faith, just him.

Three years after he placed that crown on her head in 1952 at the Cudahy High School homecoming, they exchanged wedding rings, and have been married 55 years.

Grace still calls the shots today as she takes care of Don, who lives with Multiple Sclerosis. The disease first reared its head in the late 1950s, but has gotten progressively worse since the early 1970s.

Despite the illness, Don and Grace raised four children: Michael, now 54, Donnie, 52, Roberta, 51, and Patricia, 44.

These days, it’s tough for Don to speak or move. He spends most his time in a wheelchair, while Grace takes care of him and the day-to-day tasks of the household. She helps feed him and gives him drinks through a straw.

It’s safe to say they both live with Multiple Sclerosis.

But don’t look for Grace to complain.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” she said. “I do not argue with the Lord. The Lord chose this path, and we do it. We do it with faith, and with prayer. What do you tell me, Don?”

“I pray for you twice a day,” he says.

“I ask God, ‘Please, Lord, make my shoulders big enough to handle all the gifts you give me.’ Sometimes it’s hard, but you do what you have to do.”

Faith plays a big part in their relationship, and the two attend Mass every Saturday at the VA chapel.

“If there’s one phrase I would use to describe them, it would be, ‘Mutual devotion,’” said the Rev. Norm Oswald, the Milwaukee VA’s chief of chaplains. “It’s obvious the care and love they have for each other. They live by their vows.”

Don first start experiencing severe leg and back pains soon after his Army stint ended in 1955.

They both believe that was the start of MS, but it went undiagnosed until the early 1970s. He had good days and bad, but was finally forced to retire from his carpentry job at age 47. He spent his time volunteering at the VA for 17 more years before his health forced him to

quit.

Grace said she always wanted to be a nurse, but wasn’t able to pursue that career while raising a family.

Even without the degree, she serves as Don’s main caregiver. A registered nurse from the VA visits every three weeks to change out Don’s catheter. A certified nursing assistant, provided by the VA, comes to the home every Tuesday through Thursday to help Don clean up, get dressed and shave. He also spends three days at an adult day care, which gives Grace time to relax and attend two different support groups.

“One is just a social one and we meet at (a local restaurant), but it’s good to talk to other people,” she said.

While the job is tough, Grace doesn’t shirk away from the responsibilities.

“I’m hoping it can stay this way for as long as it can. There will come a day when I’m not able to do everything, but I’m hoping to be together and here for as long as possible.”

While she takes on the challenging, she savors the good times, too.

“He’s lucky I like sports,” she said. “We watch any kind of sports on TV except hockey.” That makes Don happy. And that makes her happy. “We’ve been in love a very long time,” he says.

A Christmas Wish Come True

Decorated Vietnam Veteran Tim Burden is a rugged man. Born in Anchorage, Alaska, he served as a Combat Infantryman with the 25th Infantry Division “Tropic Lightning” earning a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for his heroic actions in 1967 at Cu Chi near Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). After returning home, the Athabaskan and Aleut Native American spent several years as a commercial fisherman in the Kodiak Islands in Alaska and the Bering Sea. Nurses affectionately call him “Bear.”

“That type of fishing is a hard life,” said Burden. “But I was up to the challenge.”

Today, Tim faces his final challenge. His stomach distended and mouth painfully dry from medications, he is a patient in Hospice Care at the Tomah VA with end stage liver disease. Years before, he had acquired Hepatitis C through a blood transfusion while serving in Vietnam.

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The disease became progressively worse over the last several years, and with only weeks to live, Tim desperately wanted to see his son, Dirk, over the holidays. But there was a problem. Dirk Burden, 37, lives in Amarillo, Texas and was unable to travel to Wisconsin to be with his father.

Enter Dr. Peggy Von Briesen, Nurse Practitioner Jolene Renda and IT Specialist Todd Steffel from the Tomah VA, IT Specialist Chris Jones from the Amarillo VA and Jim Weinke from the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN 12) in Chicago. Together they arranged for a video conference from Burden's room at the Tomah VA Medical Center to a conference room at the Amarillo VA Medical Center.

"We wanted to make Tim's Christmas wish come true," said VISN 12 Hospice and Palliative Care Coordinator, Jolene Renda. "We were very excited when it did."

At 9:00 a.m. on Monday, December 27, 2010, while Dirk waited in the conference room at the Amarillo VA, Tim, pictured below, pushed a button from his room at the Tomah VA, and suddenly, father and son were looking directly at one another. Burden was seeing his son's face for the first time in seven years.



(Following is an excerpt from their video conversation)

"So, Dad, how are you feeling?" asked Dirk.

Lying horizontal on his hospital bed, Burden struggled to see the image on the screen.

"I'm OK. I've got some real good help here, son," replied Tim. "They're all busy telling me what to do."

Dirk laughed, Tim smiled, and just like that, two men several states removed became father and son once again.

"Dad, how's Carol doing?"

"She's not feeling so well either," answered Tim. "We're both getting old and broken down."

Burden leaned forward to ask one of the nurses for a sip of water.

"Hey Dad, I want you to know I'm doing real good down here," said Dirk. "I've got a good job, a new pick-up truck and a real good mentor."

That last piece of news brought a smile to Burden's face.

"Son, I'm very proud of you," said Tim. "Thanks, Dad, I love you very much!" "I love you too, son."

Twenty minutes into the video conference, Tim Burden started to feel nauseous. He told his son not to worry about his griping. Everyone's gotta give in once in a while, he said. Dirk thanked the staff at the Tomah VA for taking real good care of his Dad. After signing off, Burden lay in his bed staring at the ceiling.

"My son looked real good," said Tim tears welling up in his eyes. "I'm proud of him."

The Great Lakes News is published for employees and stakeholders in the VA Great Lakes Health Care System. Submissions can be sent to linda.deraad@va.gov. Electronic subscriptions are available through our web site at <http://www.visn12.va.gov>.

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