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A Veterans Dying Wish Comes True

Al Albrecht (above right) greets well-wishers at the Ghost Army documentary that featured him. It was his dying wish to tell as many people as possible about his war exploits. He died 17 days after the screening.

He kept quiet for 50 years, because that's what his government told him to do. Al Albrecht was part of one of the most daring units in World War II – fighting with inflatable tanks and sound effects to make the Germans think the U.S. Army had a stronger line than it actually did. What they didn't have in actual weapons, they made up for with raw guts and trickery.

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And it worked. When the work was finally declassified in the mid-1990s, he made sure the story was told again and again to school and community groups. Albrecht kept talking until he was silenced once again – this time by prostate cancer. Losing weight rapidly and only given months to live, his daughter, Karen Skibba arranged to fulfill her dad's dying wish: To tell the world about the World War II Ghost Army.

Albrecht, now 86 and a patient in palliative care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, participated in a not-yet-released documentary on his Army unit, with many interviews conducted about four years ago. Skibba got permission from the filmmaker, Rick Beyer, to show a rough-cut screening. About 50 friends, family and fellow Veterans from Zablocki filled the Matousek Auditorium Nov. 27 for a special showing. Nurses wheeled Albrecht into the auditorium in his bed. "For the first time in months, he was smiling, and that smile didn't leave his face the entire time," Skibba said.

The documentary tells the story of a group of soldiers who became a part of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops. They nicknamed themselves the Ghost Army for their ability to stage 21 battlefield deceptions with inflatable tanks, jeeps, airplanes, trucks and sound effect recordings that made them sound like a full army on the move. When one mission was over, they'd deflate the equipment and head out again. In between those deceptions, the soldiers would sew random unit patches on their shoulders and change markings on their vehicles, pretending to be part of different units. They'd go drinking in town to throw off the enemy and make the Germans think the actual unit was on the move.

"We had a very unusual unit," Albrecht told the filmmaker Rick Beyer. "The Ghost Army had very few weapons, and not very many defensive weapons. We were mostly combat deception." His job was to drive the half-track vehicle with speakers blasting out military sounds. "I told my children it was the biggest boom box you ever saw," he said. "It played sounds of tanks and other activities." "The biggest thing we accomplished was we saved a lot of American lives, and also German lives," he continued.

"We had occasions where deferring actions saved many American lives … Imagine the face of the German commander preparing to attack and going over there and finding nothing but tracks because we were gone."

Skibba didn't learn about what her father really did in the war until he got the all-clear to talk about those missions. "He has always been so strong, but since he's gotten sick in November, everything has happened so fast. That's probably the hardest part for us. We know he doesn't have a lot of time, and this has been his dying wish to tell as many people as possible about what happened."

Photo (below) of a young Albrecht in Army uniform decorated the Matousek, along with patches from all the different units he impersonated.

Covered in a blanket and frail from his cancer treatment, Albrecht still greeted family and other well-wishers. He gratefully acknowledged the applause at the end of the documentary. "The people who were involved in this Ghost Army really deserved more attention than they got, because they saved many, many lives," he told the crowd. "Thank you for being here tonight."

Skibba said she believes her dad willed himself to stay alive to see the documentary. "He hasn't been able to stay awake for more than 15 minutes at a time, but he was awake for the full event," she said. "He was smiling the whole time. That was worth everything."

Network News

Hines

Numerous Celebrations!

Ribbon cuttings, cakes and ceremonies were the name of the game at Hines in early 2011 as the hospital opened newly-renovated areas on campus and celebrated these improvements to the look and feel of the hospital. Hines opened a brand new Prosthetics and Orthotics Lab, a new Dental Clinic, a new Patriot Café, more than 400 new parking spots, and a new Rehab and Neurology area on the 5th Floor of Building 228, all within the past few months.

"What an exciting time to be at Hines," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "We are determined to modernize and improve the environment for our patients and our staff. Right now we have more than 200 construction projects going on around the hospital. It really is a pleasure to come to work and see all the improvements and changes in our hospital."

The hospital kicked off the new year with a ribbon cutting to celebrate the new Patriot Café, which features a much more modern environment, additional seating and some beautiful patriotic art. Next, came the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Prosthetics and Orthotics Lab, which is now located on the 5th floor of Building 228, near a new Rehab and Neurology area. The new Prosthetics and Orthotics Lab offers patients spacious new modern clinic to receive their care. This is quite a change from the old location, which had been in the same location for more than 30 years.

"Our patients love this new clinic location," said Kathy Kirby, Chief of Prosthetics. "Every day we hear from patients how thrilled they are with the changes we've made. The new clinic has also been a great morale booster for our staff."

In early March, Hines cut the ribbon on a brand new Dental Clinic. The new Dental Clinic is three times the size of the old clinic, features new dental chairs and dental units, 20 private treatment rooms and state of the art equipment. The new clinic also features a training room and a new prosthetic dental lab. “We are so proud to be able to serve our Veterans in the new clinic,” said Jerry Kohen, DDS, Chief of the Hines Dental Service. “Our new clinic allows us to co-locate services like digital imaging, head and neck cat scans, anaplastology and a new prosthetic dental lab. It is the ideal set up to provide our patients with top quality dental care.”

According to Sharon Helman, Hospital Director, there are even more exciting projects coming soon at Hines. “In a few short months we will begin construction on the front lobby of the hospital,” she said. When this year-long project is complete, the entire main entrance to the hospital will be redesigned to be more functional and modern.” In addition, plans are also underway to redesign Buildings 12 and 13 on the Hines campus to accommodate returning Veterans in brand new OEF/OIF/OND Center and Compensation and Pension Exam Department. The buildings will also include a new Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Program (PRRC), a Veteran and Employee Wellness Center and a Simulation Center. Building 13 is currently under construction and will be complete in October. Building 12 will start construction this summer.

“We are all proud of the top quality care we offer our Veterans here at Hines,” Director Helman said. “The changes we are making to the environment at Hines are all part of making this hospital the best we can be on the outside as well as the inside.”

Visit From “Biggest Loser” Show Former Stars

Jerry and Estella Hayes, who starred in the "Biggest Loser" Season 7 and live nearby in Wheaton, IL, were on hand at Hines in early March to kick off the hospital’s employee and Veteran weight loss contest, entitled "Smartest Loser". They gave a motivational talk on the inspiring journey that changed their lives and allowed them to lose a combined 260 pounds between the two of them. They have kept the weight off for three years and enjoy healthy and fit lives.

“If I can do this anyone can,” said Jerry (above right). “At 63, I was the oldest contestant ever on the “Biggest Loser” show. Through diet and exercise, I managed to shift my metabolism and change my life. If you believe in yourself and trust the process, you can make this change.”

The Hayes were both eliminated from the “Biggest Loser” show in the first few weeks of the season and managed to lose the vast majority of their weight at home. As a result of the weight loss, their health has improved dramatically. They no longer are treated for high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol or gout. In addition to regaining their health, Jerry also won the One Hundred Thousand-Dollar ($100,000.) “At-home” prize for the contestant who lost the highest percentage of body weight among those voted off the show.

Both Hayes exercise 5-6 days a week and have managed to incorporate healthy eating into their routines. “We used to view food as a treat and a pleasure,” said Estella. “Now we try to see it more as fuel.”

Taking the weight loss journey one day at a time is another important lesson the Hayes passed on to the packed room of employees and Veterans who attended the program. "I have found that worrying about what I ate yesterday or thinking about what I might eat tomorrow is unproductive, " said Jerry. "You really do have to focus on the here and now."

The Hayes discussed how they struggled to start getting in shape and how they dedicated themselves to a life changing process. They shared how they overcame the myth of the mind and body regarding their age and their ability to do high intensive exercises.

The Hines audience was very inspired and even emotional about the Hayes' talk. "There were several times during their talk that I was almost moved to tears," said Lorry Luscri, a registered dietitian and Hines Health Promotion Disease Prevention Coordinator. "Seeing the footage of how they looked and sounded when they started the "Biggest Loser" and what they look and sound like today, it was truly amazing."

More than 300 participants signed up for the hospital's Smartest Loser contest, which was open to all Hines VA employees and patients. The contest began in early March, with a weigh in and ended on April 20th with a weigh-out. The focus was for employees to improve their health and focus on good eating habits during the six-week contest. Hines registered dietitians assisted contest participants by offering them individual weight loss counseling through the Hines Blog, the Facebook page and a question and answer board in the hospital.

"We are so happy with the response of our patients and staff to this contest," said Nancy Berard, a registered dietitian. "Our goal is to help our employees and our patients focus on developing healthy eating and exercise habits. Having the Biggest Loser reality show stars kick off our program was very motivating to staff and we have gotten so many great questions on the hospital blog. All of this has given health and wellness some great attention."

The Smartest Loser contest is just one of many programs at Hines focused on patient and employee wellness. The hospital has an active MOVE! Program for patients and is encouraging employees to enroll in the Wellness is Now (WIN) program. Plans are also underway for a brand new employee/veteran gym, a marked outdoor walking/running track and new exercise equipment. The hospital is also planning a 5K Run/Walk on Saturday May 7th.

Hines/Illinois National Guard Conference

Communicating and partnering with the Illinois Army National Guard so that we can effectively meet the needs of returning servicemen and women is a top priority for Hines. To foster that communication and establish new partnerships, Hines was proud to host 30 full-time Illinois National Guard men and women for a special meeting/conference at the hospital in late February.

On the agenda for the day were topics like Mental Health treatment in the VA, OEF/OIF/OND Case Management, substance abuse services and women Veteran services in the VA.

More than 40 Hines staff participated in the conference and were proud to take the National Guard men and women on tours of the hospital's new Women's Health Center, Fisher House, and Mental Health areas. This day-long conference was the brain child of Hines Suicide Prevention Coordinator Mandy Kalins and Illinois National Guard Casualties Officer Chief Mireya Peterson.

"We were so excited about the idea of meeting face to face with the full time Army National Guard soldiers and letting them know about all the services we provide," said Kalins. "We share the same commitment to the soldiers coming back. It was great for them to meet our Hines staff and hear what we have to offer first hand." Chief Peterson agreed. "I was so impressed with the people I met at Hines during the conference," she said. "It was immediately obvious to us that they are completely dedicated to helping our soldiers."

One of the highlights of the conference was a heartfelt testimonial by an Illinois National Guardsman who struggled with post traumatic stress disorder following multiple deployments and has attempted suicide.

"Here at Hines, it is certainly no surprise to us that our service members coming back from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan are struggling to adjust to life back in the States," said Dr. Thomas Nutter, Assistant Chief of the Hines Mental Health Service Line. "However, hearing firsthand from a Veteran about the challenges he faced coming back and continues to face today was very eye-opening to our staff. What a great reminder for all of us about why we are here and how important our services are to the men and women who serve our country."

Learning about the structure of the National Guard in Illinois was a great benefit for the Hines employees who attended the conference. "We can never learn too much about the way the Illinois National Guard is set up and the way they feel about the VA in general," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "That kind of dialogue and communication helps us tailor our outreach and communication efforts to best meet their needs."

Meeting the Hines staff and taking tours of various areas in the hospital were what impressed some soldiers the most.

"I have encouraged a number of my soldiers to come to the VA for treatment, but I had never been to a VA myself," said CPT Bryan Whitman.

"This conference has allowed me to meet the people that I'm sending my soldiers to….sometimes when they need help the most. I was impressed with the people and with the hospital itself."

Walking the Red Carpet

The Hines Dietetic Interns recently hosted a "Night at the Oscars" event for the residents of the hospital's Extended Care Center.

The Veterans, including John Battista (pictured in photo above) were ushered down a red carpet to their tables where sparkling white grape juice, movie trivia and a special meal awaited them. Following dessert, a compilation of clips from the Best Picture winning movies from 1962 to 2008 was shown.

The Veterans were thrilled to celebrate the "A List" service at Hines and to reminisce about Oscar winners from years past.

Fisher House Celebrates One Year

More than 150 people gathered to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Hines Fisher House in early March. Approximately 400 families have stayed in the Hines Fisher House since it opened in March of 2010. Richard C. Groharding, Department Commander of the Illinois American Legion (pictured below on left) and Holly Wright, Fisher House Manager, took a moment to pose for a photo at the anniversary Open House.

New Transportation Network for Veterans

The trip to Hines VA Hospital for Veterans from rural areas like Manteno and LaSalle became much easier this year as Hines unrolled a new hospital Transportation Network. The hospital purchased vans, hired drivers and is now offering Veterans who receive care in our LaSalle and Manteno Clinics free transportation to and from the hospital for specialty medical care.

"Our Veterans who live in rural areas often have to travel quite a distance to get to the main hospital when they need to see a specialist or have a procedure or test," said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. "We are proud to be able to offer our nation's heroes free transportation to and from the hospital. It is nothing less than they deserve."

The vans already pick up and drop off Veterans daily at the both the LaSalle and Manteno clinics effective immediately. By spring, the Transportation Network will include daily stops at the Joliet, Elgin, Oak Lawn and Aurora VA Clinics as well.

Donald Cassidy, (pictured below) a Navy Veteran from Mendota, Illinois, was one of the first Veterans who used the new van service this week. "This service is vital to us Veterans," he said. "I can't tell you what a difference it makes not to have to drive all the way to Hines for an appointment."

The hospital's new Transportation Network was created in direct response to feedback from Veterans in the rural areas who voiced concerns over the length of the trip, especially for elderly or ill Veterans. "It's all about making life easier for our nation's heroes," said Director Helman.

Iron Mountain

New Expansion Network for Veterans

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center is expanding their outpatient care clinic. The expansion entails the addition of a 14,000 square foot second story above the existing first floor outpatient clinic, which was originally designed and built to support additional floors. The new clinical space will accommodate specialty clinics such as Optometry, Neurology, Women's Wellness and Oncology/Chemotherapy. In addition, the expansion will include additional Telemedicine space as well as integrated Mental Health treatment rooms. The project is expected to last approximately 10-12 months.

Jesse Brown

Welcome Home Celebration Moves to Soldier Field

Jesse Brown VAMC's (JBVAMC) fourth annual "Welcome Home" celebration for OEF/OIF/OND Veterans moves to Chicago's Soldier Field this year and will be held on Tuesday, August 23, from 12 Noon to 8 p.m.

Although many of the activities are aimed at recently deployed Veterans, any Veteran from any era is welcome to attend and bring their families. Also known as the Illinois Warriors Summit, the event is co-sponsored by JBVAMC, World Sport Chicago and I-SAVE.

Almost 200 community, government and service organizations will provide information and assistance on employment, Veterans' benefits, housing, health care and other community resources to assist Veterans in their transition to home and family. They will include representatives from many Chicago-area employers who are actively recruiting to hire OEF/OIF/OND Veterans and will be ready to hire Veterans on the spot.

On-site registration for Veterans health benefits, My Healthe Vet in person authentication, eBenefits Premium (Level 2) DS Logon account instant request and enrollment in the IDES unemployment system will be available for eligible Veterans and service members. The event will also offer free health and vision screenings, food, raffle prizes donated by Chicago professional sports teams, massages, a Kids Corner with a variety of games and activities for the Veterans' children and live sports demonstrations by participants of the US Paralympics teams and clubs. Other entertainment will be provided by a total of 10 rock bands performing throughout the day and evening.

Last year's Welcome Home celebration was attended by over 2,500 Veterans, many of whom brought their families, and was hailed by VA Secretary Eric Shinseki as a model that should be used for other Welcome Home celebrations nationwide.

Madison

Grand Opening Celebration for Building 22

Deborah Thompson, Director, and Dr. Dean Krahn, Chief, Mental Health Service Line, at the Grand Opening of Building 22.

The Madison VAH celebrated the grand opening of Building 22 on January 28, 2011. In addition to tours of the building and refreshments, staff were also able to stroll on the new skywalk, named the Overlook Corridor, that connects Building 22 to the hospital.

The first and second floors of Building 22 house current programs, the Resilience and Recovery (R & R) Program and Ambulatory Care, respectively. The R & R Program is part of the Mental Health Service Line and provides comprehensive and interdisciplinary care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many types of treatments are offered, including medication evaluation and management, effective evidence-based individual psychotherapies (Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure), group therapy, and case management. The R & R Program also houses an active PTSD research program. The Ambulatory Care administrative offices include part of Primary and Specialty Care services. There are a mixture of clinical and administrative staff located in the space allowing for the multidisciplinary staff to easily communicate patient issues, needs, and care plans.

The third floor is shelled-in and will be completed this year. It will house a new Employee Education Resource Center (EERC). The EERC will have two large multi-purpose classrooms, two high technology conference rooms, a computer lab, and a mock in-patient room with working bathroom. An employee friendly welcome center is also being planned.

According to Dr. Tim Hunt, Chief of Education, the new education center will be a learning laboratory equipped to support distance learning opportunities and host live webinars as well as design and conduct a wide variety of training and development programs. Additionally, the EERC will have interactive, real-time audio/visual connections with all of our CBOCs, our VISN and other VHA national agencies.

The EERC represents a key infrastructure improvement that will provide all employees an opportunity to continue their personal and professional development. The EERC will also enable interdisciplinary teams to train collaboratively and evaluate evidence -based research and best practices – all with the intent of providing only the highest quality of care for our Veteran patients.

Celebrating Magnet Designation Anniversary by Helping Homeless Veterans

Magnet Champions, left to right, Heather Anderson, Mchelle Lisowski, Elizabeth Fayram, Beth Davidson, Marcia Dobrick, Nicole Luck, Jacenta Best, and, kneeling, Angie Krey.

In honor of the 1st anniversary of the Madison VAH being designated as a Magnet Facility, the Nursing department has planned activities throughout the year to support homeless Veterans. The first activity challenged each hospital unit or area to collect the most personal care items for homeless Veterans. These efforts were wildly successful, with over 2933 pounds of personal care items collected from Jan 20th thru Feb 21st – over 1.5 tons! Items were not only purchased and donated by hospital staff but also collected from dental offices, apartment complexes, stores, credit unions, family and friends. During this campaign, the hospital sponsored a "Wear Your Packer Shirt to Work" day, encouraging staff to bring in a personal care item donation. This mini-campaign collected over 75 pounds of items.

Cash donations were also received from individuals and community groups, including a church that donated $705 to the VA's Homeless Veteran Program and individuals who donated a combined total of over $1100 to Porchlight, Inc., in Madison, for their homeless Veteran transitional housing.

The personal care items will be used by Community Relations Service, Porchlight, the Madison Vet Center, Homeless Veteran Housing in Janesville, and the Freeport Veteran Assistance Commission.

Transplant Program Milestone

The Madison VAH Heart/Lung Transplant Program celebrated a milestone in February 2011. From January 6 through February 18, five Veterans received lung transplants and two received heart transplants. The program typically averages around 2 or 3 transplants per month. Seven transplants in a 6-week period is a tremendous record! Seeing this kind of program growth is a credit to the overwhelming success of the Transplant Program.

University of Wisconsin Women's Hockey Team Honors Veterans

Captain Angela Joseph-Gaffke, a Veteran of Desert Storm and Desert Shield, was a special guest at the University of Wisconsin (UW) - Madison Women's Hockey game on 2/13/11. Captain Joseph-Gaffke dropped the puck to start the UW game against North Dakota. The Badgers were victorious with the final score of 8-4 and were presented with the Western Collegiate Hockey Association regular season conference trophy after the game. The UW Athletic Department honored all Veterans at this game with reduced admission.

Captain Joseph-Gaffke is a nurse and currently serves as the Wisconsin Army National Guard State Surgeon's Medical Operation Officer as well as the Occupational Health Nurse-Specialist. In addition to her wartime service, she has been deployed many times to countries in Europe and Central America.

Taste a Rainbow

Dieticians Tammy Licari, Carla Newcomer and Ashley McCormick provide staff with information on healthy grains and the benefits of dark chocolate as well as dishing out samples of hummus, soy beans and fennel.

In celebration of National Nutrition Month, the Madison VAH hosted an open house for staff, patients and visitors on March 3rd. There were a variety of displays on healthful eating and living, including a wide variety of food to sample. Some of the food samples were familiar such as dark chocolate, carrots, plain popcorn and sweet potatoes. Other food samples were a little less familiar such as soy beans, pomegranate seeds, butternut squash soup, and the vegetable fennel (which tastes a bit like black licorice). Nutrition and Employee Health staff were available to answer questions and provide helpful information.

Milwaukee

Art Project

Veteran sculptors (from left to right) John Gomold, Brian Coones and James Catledge stand in front of their creation " Surrender"

When Mother Nature dumped several inches — before the big blizzard — art therapist Alice Ann Konkel used it for a free, art project without busting the VA budget. "It was a way for Veterans to reconnect with their childhood memories and the fun of playing in the snow, while giving them a creative outlet."

Veterans created six different sculptures, including a giant cup of cocoa, a squirrel, eagle, volcano, a couple sitting on a bench, and a human being looking inside through a window. The human sculpture "Surrender," was named after the first step a person needs to take to break an addiction, said one of the creators, John Gomold. "You have to take that first step, and admit you need help, and that's what we wanted to represent — someone looking in, ready to come in and get help," he said. "Surrender" won first place in the group category.

Turtle

It's called a "Turtle." But make no mistake, the technology behind it is anything but slow and using it puts Veteran Richard Mueller on the fast track to maintaining his health.

The Turtle and its equivalent device, the Health Buddy, assist Veterans and nurses in the Care Coordination/Home Telehealth program at Zablocki by providing a "snapshot" of health which is monitored on a daily basis by a care coordinator. This way coordinators are able to pinpoint if there is a medical issue, change medication or get the Veteran more treatment, which cuts down on hospital stays and opens more beds up for other patients. "It's outstanding," said Veteran Richard Muller, who uses the Turtle to monitor his healthcare. "This way, things are caught right away."

Veterans who sign up for the program bring the machine – about the size of an oversized paperback and weighing a couple pounds – to their home, and then hook it up to their telephone. Each day, Muller uses the machine to answer a series of questions from his home in Green Bay, and it's automatically sent to a secure web site that's reviewed by nurses at the Zablocki VA. "We're the liaison between the Veteran and the provider who can assist in beginning an intervention," said lead coordinator Vicki Stephan. "The goal is to help people in the self-management of chronic diseases to decrease unnecessary (Emergency Department) visits and hospitalizations, and to delay placement in a long-term care setting."

Coordinators use the machines to currently monitor diabetes mellitus, hypertension, congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, dementia, depression and weight management.

The Turtle asks Muller and others enrolled in the program to enter vital signs such as blood pressure (taken with an electronic cuff) or glucose level. After taking the vital sign readings, a short health assessment is presented to the Veteran, such as, "How swollen are your feet or ankles today?" Depending on the Veteran's input, the device may give an answer such as, "If you are not having this symptom, you are doing a good job in managing your heart failure," or, "A higher than normal salt intake can cause swelling in your ankles or other parts of your body."

This provides useful education the Veteran can use to avoid the problem in the future or at least give a possible cause for the symptom.

Once the Veteran has entered all of his or her vitals and completed the health assessment the data is transmitted to the care coordinator who reviews the information. Depending on the answers, the responses will trigger a green, yellow or red light. "If it's red, it's something serious, and we call the Veteran right away, and suggest they go to an emergency room, and we alert their primary care physician. If it's yellow, they might have to adjust something."

Muller isn't the only one who likes the system. Officials said more than 85 percent of the enrolled Veterans report they are satisfied with the program. While many of the 260 Veterans currently enrolled in Telehealth are in the Milwaukee area, for Veterans such as Mueller, who resides in Green Bay, the daily interaction provides assurances he wouldn't otherwise get.

Simple solutions, such as changing medication can be done with a nurse discussing the issue with primary care provider, as opposed to waiting and the issue turning more serious and requiring hospitalization down the road.

Stephan said recent data shows the system has reduced bed days of care in Milwaukee by almost 60 percent. That number is expected to go higher next year when enrollment will double, and other Veterans will be able to use a similar device with a cell phone.

Homeless Veteran Stand Down

Ron Santilli, a retired VA dentist, checks the teeth of James Winslow at the Homeless Veterans Stand-Down

James Winslow leaned back in the chair and said, "Ahhhh." Living on the street, he doesn't have the ability to set up dental appointments, but was appreciative of the offer at the Feb. 19 Homeless Veteran Stand Down, put together by Veterans Stand Down, Inc.

The Zablocki VA Medical Center joined forces with the organization, along with many other groups, to get homeless Veterans enrolled in healthcare, help them find a job, and get them back on their feet. All told, the event attracted hundreds, with 130 of them stopping by to register or check-in for VA healthcare. A total of 194 people showed, with 96 attending for the first time. Those not interested in the VA aspect, still got information on housing, jobs, a free haircut and a couple good meals, including a steak lunch. "This is good, stick-to-your-ribs kind of food," said retired Air Force Col. Gwen Sheppard. "We don't want people to go back out in the cold on an empty stomach. If they get anything else here today, it's a warm meal that fills them up. As my mother used to say, 'If you leave here hungry, it's your own fault.'"

The Stand Down, now in its 22nd year, took place at the Wisconsin National Guard Armory, 4108 North Richards Street, in Milwaukee. Buses circled the Milwaukee area to bring homeless Veterans to the armory. Typically, after arriving, Veterans got a bag filled with toiletries, some clean underwear and other necessities. Off to one side, a municipal judge was on hand to help clear up legal issues that might prevent a Veteran from finding housing.

Once that part was taken care of, Veterans had the options of signing in to see if they were eligible for healthcare, while volunteers checked their status and helped them order a DD Form 214. From there, participants could get a TB test, eye-screening and dental check-up. "For me, I want to make sure my teeth are taken care of, and this is a chance to do that," said Winslow, who served in the Army from 1973 to 1976. "The VA has always been very good to me, and I tell all my friends who are Veterans to let them help, and sign up. I'm hoping this can help me get ahead, get a good place to stay. Every little bit helps."

Ron Santilli, a retired VA dentist, was on hand to do the work, along with volunteers Emma Harrell and Vennette Edwards. Both have been volunteering at the Stand Down for years. "We do it because we enjoy helping Veterans," Edwards said.

"A lot of people come through the door. If we help one, we've helped. As long as there is a need." That message was repeated by VA employees and other volunteers from throughout the armory. The VA had people on hand to do TB testing, help guide recent Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and female Veterans. Others were on hand to talk about the domiciliary, which offer 90-day temporary housing, as well as information on substance abuse counseling and programs.

Jay Whisenten, who is going to cosmetology school at the Milwaukee Area Technical College, and who owns a barber shop, was on hand with others to give free haircuts. "It's about helping people to make them feel better about themselves," he said. "I make money on my job, but I don't want to forget about giving back to the community."

Clifton Luckett, who was getting a haircut, said the VA helped him not to be homeless. "I come back every year because the Milwaukee VAMC and the Stand Down have been very helpful," he said. "As a Veteran, I am grateful."

Across the room, the Department of Workforce Development was on hand to help people find jobs, and in another area, volunteer George Martin was getting ready to go on stage to pump up the crowd. "I tell you why I do it. I'm not a Veteran, but because I saw many of the guys I grew up with on the north side, people I went to elementary school with, on the street and homeless. So for me, it's personal. I want to help them," said Martin, a self-described motivational speaker, who put those words into action, when he worked the crowd into a frenzy. "We don't want you to be the ones we remember next year," he said, after taking a moment of silence for those who died on the street. "Use us, don't abuse us. Take advantage of what is here."

Greg Jacobs, president of Veterans Stand Down, Inc., who has organized the event for more than two decades, was busy working with the VA, volunteers and other agencies to make sure people got to the different booths. The Vietnam Veteran and Purple Heart recipient said it goes back to the brotherhood he learned in the Marine Corps. You don't leave anyone behind on the battlefield. "We do have a brotherhood, and it's a way of helping out one another. It's a bond," he said. "The one thing we tell people is, 'we're not a program.' Our job is to get people here, and we provide the menu." Some of these guys

just don't know the programs that are out there, or what's available, or if they're eligible. We encourage them and try to connect them to the agencies. Then it's up to them."

Jacobs looks around at the crowd of people, but says the numbers aren't discouraging. "Every year, I see success, and I hear of a success story," he said. "I don't dwell on the unsuccessful. I am encouraged by the success stories, and that's what drives me to help other people."

Lovell FHCC

Thirty-three Sailors Promoted at "Frocking" Ceremony

As an organization known for firsts, leadership of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center promoted their first 33 sailors in a "frocking" ceremony for non-commissioned officers Dec. 10.

Frocking is a process of wearing an assumed rank prior to their official promotion. When selected for promotion, but awaiting a "line number" to pin on the new rank, a commander can allow a sailor to assume the new rank early. While the sailor's pay isn't updated until their promotional line number is actually released, the ceremony honors them with the wearing of a higher rank.

Patriot Store opens

A ribbon was cut Dec. 3 at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, opening another first-of-its-kind store within the nation's first Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense federal health care center.

The new "Patriot's Store" is part of the Veterans Canteen Service, and like most VCS facilities, it offers a variety of foods, goods and services to its customers. However, with the unique integrated role of the Lovell FHCC, the Patriot's Landing also offers items specific to the needs of military members.

"To succeed in our mission, it was vital that we were not only offering our standard assortment of goods, but that we were offering items that were important to our military members and our Veterans," said Kim Wasilewski, Lovell FHCC Assistant Patriot's Service Chief. Wasilewski noted that the newly renovated 1,700 square-feet of space allows them the room to offer military equipment and uniform items -- a first for any Veterans Canteen Service.

"After serving for more than 21 years with the Veterans Canteen Service, I can honestly say that this is -- by far -- the most extraordinary change I've ever taken part in," said Sharon Daugherty, Lovell FHCC Patriots Service Chief.

The Veterans Canteen Service has been a part of North Chicago landscape since the service's inception nearly 65 years ago. While there have been many updates through the years, this renovation and expansion is the largest to date.

USS Red Rover Vital to Recruit Medical, Dental Readiness

In the early hours of a frigid January morning in northern Illinois, divisions of U.S. Navy recruits line up outside of Bldg. 1523 -- also known as USS Red Rover -- for their initial medical and dental procedures.

Regardless of the temperature, this scene repeats itself throughout the year, as new recruits are processed into the U.S. Navy. In-processing "tasks" are divided into 5 processing days called "P Days." During these dates, recruits receive a substantial number of vital medical and dental tasks, ensuring they are physically ready for their role in the U.S. Navy.

"This stop is typically a recruit's first exposure to Navy medicine and dentistry," said Dr. Ronald Rudlaff, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center's USS Red Rover Assistant Department Head of Dentistry. "While their dental readiness is absolutely our top priority, it's also important that we make a positive impression on them." Rudlaff explained that in 9 to 10 combined minutes, a recruit receives a dental exam, three x-rays and a forensics exam.

This would typically average an hour outside of the training environment. Moving at that pace, the annual dentistry numbers can be staggering: More than 164,000 patient encounters, more than 46,700 tooth extractions and just under 81,000 routine dental restorations. In total, these procedures would equate to more than $72 million in community dental services.

"It's orderly chaos in the most organized fashion," said Rudlaff. "The men and women who perform this delicate 'ballet' between dental and medical tasks are impressive, as we all push toward the common goal of readiness." As one of four Branch Medical Clinics that are part of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, USS Red Rover processes more than 40,000 enlisted recruits annually.

During the first two processing days, recruits are registered into the Composite Health Care System and their medical records are created; they are also given a Tubercullin Skin Test, a blood draw, and their DNA cards are collected.

It's during P-3 and P-4 that recruits receive the majority of their medical and dental tasks, explained Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Andrew Archila, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center's Department Head for USS Red Rover. These include male/female wellness counseling (female wellness exam and pregnancy counseling), an average of 5 immunizations, dental x-ray and exams, an optometry exam (same-day glasses) and a physician exam (for recruits with allergies, high body-mass index, physical activity issues and current complaints).

"The only reason we're able to do what we do is because of the phenomenal professionals we have at USS Red Rover," said Archila. "What's impressive is that we focus so much on patient safety, but are able to process enormous number of recruits in a short period of time."

Like the dental side, the annual averages for USS Red Rover's medical tasks are impressive: They produce nearly 18,500 glasses, administer nearly 200,000 immunizations, provide approximately 10,000 gynecological exams, administer nearly 40,000 hearing exams, and collect and exam nearly 200,000 tubes of blood.

"Recruit Training Command is under enormous time constraints while recruits are in a training environment," said Archila. "This is why it's so important that our medical and dental portions are completed thoroughly and quickly, and that we get the recruits back to their training."

Most recruits will graduate and honorably serve on Naval stations and ships around the world. While few will ever forget their in-processing experience at USS Red Rover, most will never truly appreciate the scale and impressive process for their medical and dental readiness.

"Operation Happy Feet" Warms Winter

The idea started as something simple: A friend and fellow Veteran in the Community Living Center needed a pair of shoes for walking around the facility.

This is how Matt Kiger, Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center desktop supervisor and choreographer of the Operation Happy Feet project, described the project's genesis.

When we saw the need, we decided to assemble moccasins for all Veterans in the Community Living Center of Bldg. 134-2B who wanted them," said Kiger.

Through donations from the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center's craft center, Kiger teamed up with U.S. Army Veterans Carlos Saunders, Martin Johnson, Michael Quinn, and U.S. Navy Veterans Mike Pfanzer, Lyonel Johnson and Dale Anderson, to assemble and deliver 20 pairs of moccasins to Veterans in Bldg. 134-2B.

"This is military Veterans helping other Veterans," said Kiger. "When we were serving, we always took care of one another. This is just another way for us to continue doing that."

Kiger noted that the program was established to ensure that all residents who wish to have a pair of moccasins are provided them, regardless of their ability to assemble the moccasin kits. By taking advantage of the kits provided by Help Hospitalized Veterans, Kiger's team volunteers put together the kits in the required sizes at the Craft Center of Bldg. 134. "It takes me about 1.5 to 2 hours per pair," explained Kiger of the time needed to assemble the moccasins. "But seeing the look on their faces when we hand them the shoes makes it worth every minute."

Kiger noted that the group is now planning to put together additional moccasins for the remaining wards on the facility, but is actively looking for additional help. Those wishing to assist in Operation Happy Feet are encouraged to check out and assemble a moccasin kit from the Craft Center, and bring it back to the same location for later distribution.

Tomah

4th Annual " Get Fit for Life Night"

Sixty-six people attended the 4th Annual Get Fit for Life Night in the VA Chapel on January 26. Dr. Brad Zupancich presented "Exercising like a Caveperson for Total Body Health" and Dr. Sarah Yanko presented "Yoga for Health." Both presentations engaged the audience. He addressed the effects and benefits of physical activity.

Dr. Zupancichs' interest in exercise comes from a lifelong passion for improving and maintaining health. He has overseen life-changing improvements in patients, family, and friends through simple lifestyle adjustments.

La Crosse Health Science Academy Visit

Forty-seven students (juniors and seniors in high school) and faculty visited the Tomah VA on Tuesday, February 1 for a tour and an opportunity to meet some healthcare professionals. Prior to coming here, the students made at stop at Fort McCoy. Said Martha McCabe, Executive Director of the program, "Thank you so much for an incredible day. The students (and faculty)

remarked throughout the day, how valuable the experience was. They only wish they had more time at all of the stops. So next year, we will probably look to schedule Fort McCoy and the Tomah VA on two separate days in order to maximize our time. We are so grateful for the time you gave to these students and some would like to return for an extended "job shadow" experience in the future. One young woman even pulled a faculty member aside and said I think that I would like to enter the military to obtain my training and work in this environment. We call those the "Ah Ha" moments that really can't be captured by statistics, but are life-altering for the student that experiences it. Thank you again for opening up not only your place of business, but sharing your passion. And, please extend our thanks to all of the other staff that helped to make this day possible."

Veterans Attend 88th Annual Snowflake Ski Jump

Veterans attended the 88th Annual Snowflake Ski Jump held on February 5th in Westby, WI. The event played host to about 30 world-class ski jumpers from Norway, Russia, Poland, Finland, Canada and the United States. Many Olympic hopefuls have competed in previous years at the Snowflake Ski Jumping Complex. The ski jump complex at Snowflake consists of five jumps. The largest (and used for this event's competition) is a 118 meter Olympic-sized hill.

Event workers kept large fires going to keep spectators warm. Next year we're making s'mores! Veterans enjoyed sitting outside again this year on lawn chairs for some winter fresh air. Some Veterans enjoyed taking guesses on how far they thought the jumpers flew (possibly being asked to judge next year….), talking with the snowflake royalty, enjoying food from the concession stand, ringing cow bells to cheer on the jumpers and even taking photos of the event. Thanks to the sponsors like Logistics Health Incorporated, all Veterans and family were admitted free to the event.

VA to Build New Clinic in Clark County

Tomah VA broke ground on February 14, 2011 on a new 3100 square foot Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Clark County. The new clinic will be located in Owen, Wisconsin along the Highway 29 corridor that connects Wausau, Wisconsin and Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Owen lies between two major cities (50 miles to Chippewa Falls and 51 miles to Wausau) and also borders Taylor County which does not have a VA CBOC. The Owen site is co-located with a local medical clinic which has on site Radiology and the potential for a sharing agreement. The Owen CBOC will be open 4 days a week and may expand to a 5 day operation pending the demand. The clinic will provide Primary Care, Lab Services, Tele-MOVE, Mental Health Services, Women's Health services, enrollment and registration and other group classes. Future expansion of services may include Tele-Heath (Tele-Dermatology, Tele-Rheumatology), a Social Worker and a Dietitian. All Veterans using Tomah VA services that live in Clark, Taylor, and Eau Claire counties will receive a letter announcing the new clinic and the services it will provide. The project will be completed in August 2011.

Decorated Iraq Female Veteran Speaks in Honor of Women's History Month

US Army Major Kate Guttormsen (left) spoke and toured the new "Ability" gym with PMRS Supervisor Kris Valest on March 4, 2011 in honor of Women's History Month. Major Guttormsen was featured in the film documentary, "Lioness."

"Lioness" tells the story of a group of female support soldiers who were part of the first program in American history to send women into direct combat. These young women fought in some of the bloodiest counterinsurgency battles of the Iraq war and returned home as part of this country's first generation of female combat Veterans. Together the women's candid narratives describing their experiences in Iraq and scenes from their lives back home form a portrait of the emotional and psychological effects of war from a female point of view.
www.lionessthefilm.com

Veteran Rolls Game of a Lifetime

Even Veteran Cyrus "Cy" Gloff admits it was a little anti-climatic, but shoot it was still one heck of a game. About two months ago, Cy went down to the Bowling Alley for his daily afternoon bowl. First frame of the first game—Cy knocks down 9 pins and picks up the spare. Good start. Second frame—strike. Third frame—strike. Fourth frame—strike. By the fifth frame Cy knew he was in a groove. "The strikes kept coming," said Cy. "I knew something special was happening." When the smoke cleared, he had recorded 11 strikes in a row for a 290. "I was pretty amazed." Gloff then bowled two more games *(beginning with a strike in the first frame of the second game—here we go again)* rolling a 166 and a 146 for a 602 series.

Highest game ever? "Oh yeah," declared Cy. Gloff has been bowling for 50 years, with 6 years at the Tomah VA. He will compete again this year in the Bowlers for Veterans (BVL). 2011 is the 65th anniversary of the tournament, which began in 1946, when the first WWII Veterans were returning from the battlefields of Europe. Since then, literally thousands of Veterans nationwide have been part of the tournament. This year, the tournament will also feature divisions for the popular Wii bowling game, allowing those Veterans who are physically unable to get to the bowling lanes the opportunity to enjoy the sport. When complete, bowlers will send their scores into the BVL headquarters to see how they measure up against VA bowlers from more than 100 hospitals around the country. Winners of the nine divisions will be announced in May. Gloff will compete with other Tomah VA bowlers in the wheelchair division.

Awards and Recognition

Jesse Brown

Physician Receives Distinguished Service Award

Guy Weinberg, MD, a staff anesthesiologist at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, has been named the recipient of the 2010 Distinguished Service Award from the American Society of Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine (ASRA).

Dr. Weinberg is renowned for his pioneering work in the treatment of life-threatening local anesthetic toxicity and serves as the Chair of ASRA's Working Group on Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity. He is also the Vice Head for Research in Anesthesiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), an affiliate of JBVAMC, and serves as a Professor of Anesthesiology at UIC.

Last year, the Anesthesia Patient Safety Foundation presented Dr. Weinberg with the Ann S. Lofsky, MD, Research Award for his current study on "Developing an Educational Tool for Managing Local Anesthetic Systemic Toxicity. He has also received a VA Merit Award for a previous study on "Cardiac Preservation with Bupivacaine and Lipid Rescue."

Dr. Wendy Brown, Chief of Staff at Jesse Brown VAMC, said the honor was well deserved. "Dr. Weinberg is an outstanding clinician and researcher," she said. "We are privileged to have him as a member of our medical staff."

Dr. Weinberg will receive the ASRA Distinguished Service Award at the Society's annual meeting on May 5 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Madison

National Patient Safety Award

The Madison VA Hospital was one of a select few facilities to have been awarded **Gold** level status from the National Center for Patient Safety for their Root Cause Analysis (RCA) process in reviewing, analyzing, and developing sound solutions to patient safety concerns. This is a very prestigious award within the VA healthcare system. Ms. Jean Farrell-Holtan, Chief of Performance Improvement, and Ms. Lynn Manske, Patient Safety Officer, coordinate and manage this program.

Someone You Should Know

James W. Rice was appointed Medical Center Director at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, Michigan by the Secretary of Veteran Affairs effective April 10, 2011.

Prior to assuming this position, Mr. Rice served as the Quality Management Officer for the Veterans in Partnership Network (VISN 11) from October 2006 to April 2011 where he was responsible for the development, oversight, coordination, and leadership of all quality and performance programs throughout the VISN. In addition, Mr. Rice served as the Acting Medical Center Director at the Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center (Saginaw, Michigan) from July 2009 to December 2009.

Mr. Rice began his VA career as a Safety Manager at the VA Medical Center in Allen Park, Michigan in 1990. He has held positions of increasing responsibility at the VA Medical Center in Detroit, Michigan and at the Veterans In Partnership Network (VISN 11) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, as the Network Safety & Occupational Health Manager.

Mr. Rice is a 2008 graduate of the 113th Interagency Institute for Federal Health Care Executives and Health Care Leadership Institute for Executive Career Field Members. He is also a member of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

All In Good Fun!

The NFL play-offs reached a new level of intensity when the Bears and Packers played each other in the play offs.

With the stakes high, Sharon Helman, Director of the Hines VA Hospital came up with a little arrangement with Robert Beller, Director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. If the Bears won the game, Milwaukee would have to run a photo of Hines employees dressed up in Bears Wear on their website. If the Packers won, Hines would have to run the Milwaukee employees photo on their website.

Well, we know that the Packers won and Hines ran the Milwaukee employee photo on their website!

National Salute to Veteran Patients

VA facilities across our Network celebrated "National Salute to Veterans Week!"

Jesse Brown VAMC hosted a visit by Congressman Mike Quigley (5th Congressional District of Illinois) on February 7th. The Congressman visited inpatients and distributed Valentines personally made by schoolchildren residing in the 5th Congressional District. Patients not on dietary restrictions also received packets of candy.

Congressman Mike Quigley (right) shares a valentine with JBVAMC veteran Joseph Eibenberger. Congressman Quigley brought into the medical center hundreds of valentines personally made by schoolchildren residing in his district.

The Voluntary Services from **Jesse Brown VAMC**, **Hines VA Hospital** and the **James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center** co-sponsored a free "Valentines for Veterans" concert at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Forum on Saturday afternoon, February 12, featuring the popular Chicago-based R&B vocal group The Chi-Lites. A packed crowd of approximately 2500 Veterans, Gold Star family members and guests attended.

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

Prior to the concert, informational tables on VA and other Veterans services were set up in the UIC Forum lobby. A total of 40 Veterans were enrolled for VA care and another 43 signed up to volunteer at either JBVAMC or Hines. As Veterans and their guests entered the concert seating area, they were entertained by "The Dogz" jazz band.

The program began with Miss Cook County, Imani Josey, serving as Master of Ceremonies. The first introduction was for a surprise act – a Michael Jackson impressionist – brought in by The Chi-Lites.

The Michael Jackson impressionist (left) and Pat Gleason, Jesse Brown VAMC's Voluntary Service Chief (right).

Afterwards, a short formal program was held, including a special tribute to the six Gold Star families present who had lost a son or daughter in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The Chi-Lites came on stage and played for about 1-1/2 hours. At the concert's conclusion, the group invited a large number of Veterans and VA volunteers to join them on stage for the final song.

Marshall Thompson of The Chi-Lites leads a procession of Veterans and volunteers invited to dance on stage for the concert's final song.

"Not only do the numbers (of Veterans in attendance) speak for themselves, but to witness the joy and happiness on the faces of our Veterans and their loved ones as they enjoyed the show illustrates the true value of this event," Gleason said. "Regardless of any hardships and worries these Veterans may have in their lives, the concert provided them with a brief 'vacation' from those worries. They were able to be carefree and forget their problems, if only for a few hours. It was a great way to say 'thank-you' to those who served."

The **Madison VAH** recognized this national celebration with a variety of events. On Sunday, February 13th, a gift distribution was conducted and sponsored by the VAVS Committee; general visitations and distribution of valentines took place; and an Ice Cream Social for patients and their visitors was held. Special guests included state representatives from Veteran's organizations; the Knights of Columbus clowns; Coach Mike Eaves and the team captains from the University of Wisconsin (UW) Men's Hockey team; athletes from the UW Women's Soccer, Rowing, Track, Golf and Basketball teams; and the UW Reserve Officer Training Corps Honor Society.

Athletes from the University of WI-Madison Women's soccer Team visit with Veteran Thomas Taylor

A Valentine's Day dinner, sponsored by local Veterans organizations and coordinated by the American Red Cross, was held on Monday, February 14th, for the transplant patients and their caregivers, who are currently residing either in-house or at community hotels. Bedside visitations and valentine distributions by students from the Spirit Club at Blackhawk Middle School took place on Tuesday, February 15th. The Valentine Candy Jar Guessing Contest was held for inpatients on Wednesday, February 16th with cash prizes totaling $100. On Saturday, February 19th, another ice cream social was held for patients and their visitors. This was sponsored by Soldiers Angels and the volunteers from that group also visited with patients and distributed blankets. Over 4,000 valentines were distributed.

The **Tomah VA Medical Center** held several events to celebrate the Salute this year.

Marine Corps League and daughter deliver valentines to Veterans

Miss Wisconsin, Kimberly Sawyer, visited with Veterans during Salute week

Employees Jeff Evanson, Deb Thiel and Steve pose with the ladies of the Cranberry Royalty just prior to cutting of the Valentine's Day cake

The W-5 Quintet performs for Veterans during the Valentine's Day lunch

Congressional Visits

The staff at **Hines'** LaSalle County Community Based Outpatient Clinic was thrilled to host a visit from Illinois Congressman Adam Kinzinger in late March. Congressman Kinzinger took office in January of this year and this was his first visit to a VA clinic. He met with Sharon Helman, Hines Hospital Director, during his visit to discuss the VA in general and Hines in particular. Congressman Kinzinger's 11th District includes Veterans who receive their care at the Manteno Clinic, the LaSalle Clinic and the Joliet Clinic. "I was thrilled to get the opportunity to talk with the Congressman about the care we provide to Veterans in our CBOCs," said Director Helman. "As a Veteran himself, this is a subject that is near and dear to his heart. It was a great to see him so engaged in topics like Veterans and healthcare."

Director Helman explained the new Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model to the Congressman and informed him about the hospital's new transportation network that offers Veterans at the LaSalle and Manteno Clinics free van service to and from Hines daily. Then, Pat Catalanello, the Charge Nurse at the LaSalle CBOC, toured the Congressman around the clinic, introducing him to staff and patients.

The current LaSalle Clinic location opened in October of 2010 and is a beautiful, modern facility for Veterans in this area. "The whole visit was a lot of fun," Pat said. "We love to show off our new clinic and the care that we provide to our elected officials. We are so proud of what we do here in LaSalle."

Congressman Kinzinger was also present at a legislative forum in Kankakee County the same week, where Hines Director Sharon Helman announced a new clinic location that will be opening up in the fall of 2011. Hines will relocate the current Manteno Clinic to a much larger, more modern facility, about seven miles away in Bourbonnais, IL.

"I am so pleased that the VA is expanding services to Veterans in Kankakee County," Congressman Kinzinger said. "I receive so much positive feedback about the VA from my constituents. It was a pleasure to visit a clinic in person and meet the caring individuals who are treating our veterans."

Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson made his first-ever stop at a VA hospital when he made a whirlwind visit March 23 of the **Clement J. Zablocki Medical Center** in Milwaukee. Johnson, who was elected in November, made the trip with his state director, retired Army Lt. Col. Tony Blando, who has received treatment in the past at the hospital. Medical Center Director Robert Beller showed Johnson around the hospital, with stops at the Emergency Department, Urgent Care, Pharmacy, the Primary Care Red Clinic, chapel and acute ward. Johnson mingled with employees and Veteran patients, thanking them for their service. Beller and other VA officials also briefed Johnson on construction projects, benefits and other issues facing the medical center. He also got a tour of the grounds, including the historic district.

Before leaving, the senator stopped briefly on the fourth floor acute ward to chat with Navy veteran Joe Turecek, (left) who served in the Navy from 1977 to 1989. Johnson made a point to talk to as many people as possible during the two-hour visit, asked detailed questions about the services offered, and thanked them for the work they do.

"It was my honor to visit with the men and women of America's armed services, who have sacrificed so much in defense of America and its people," Johnson said. "It was also a privilege to spend some time with the dedicated doctors, nurses, and staff of the Milwaukee VA Hospital, who are caring for them."

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