The Great Lakes News

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Historic Stitching Ceremony

In early May, Hines proudly hosted a Historic Stitching ceremony on behalf of the state of Illinois to repair the American Flag destroyed in the aftermath of 9/11. This special ceremony, included firefighters from New York, as well as local Illinois heroes, including Chicago Fire Commissioner, Robert Hoff, and the Fire Chief and Police Chief from nearby Broadview, IL.

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A number of Hines employees, including Chuck Dickinson from the hospital's Facilities Management Service, and Jerry Schutter, Chief of the Blind Center, were among the "heroes" nominated to participate in the official stitching ceremony at the hospital. Approximately 50 Hines patients were honored to take their turn at officially placing a stitch in this impressive flag as well.

Destroyed in the aftermath of the World Trade Center on September 11th and stitched back together seven years later by tornado survivors in Greensburg, Kansas, the National 9/11 Flag is a living testament to the resilience and compassion of the American people. It has been called the modern day version of the Star Spangled Banner.

"We were thrilled to host this most special ceremony at Hines," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "Duty, Honor and Sacrifice are words that mean a lot to the employees at Hines. Every day we provide healthcare and services to military Veterans and service members who have stepped up to serve our country.

As Veterans of the United States military, our patients are our nation's heroes. Our own Illinois firefighters and police officers are ready to put their lives on the line for us as citizens of this country. It was a unique honor for us to take a moment to remember the sacrifices of these great Americans, both in New York and here in Illinois, as we put the Illinois restorative patching on this incredible flag right here at Hines."

Army Veteran and Hines Patient Michael Hoff (center) was one of the Illinois Heroes who participated in the National 9/11 Flag Ceremony. He is assisted by New York Firefighter Jimmy Sands (on left) and Caroline Deters (on right) from the NY Says Thank You Foundation.

The Hines auditorium was packed with police officers, firemen, news media and of course employees, all interested in participating in the flag stitching ceremony and taking part in this historic event. Four Chicago White Sox pitchers, Mark Buehrle, Matt Thornton, John Danks and Chris Sale, also happened to be at Hines visiting patients on this historic day and took time to place a stitch in the 9/11 flag. "We were so honored to take part in today's ceremony," said Buehrle. "We would not be playing baseball if it were not for the sacrifices of the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces," he added. "It's always an honor to come to Hines and visit the Veterans here. What great timing that we can also participate in this historic flag stitching while we are here."

The New York Says Thank You Foundation is currently taking the National 9/11 Flag on a journey across America where local service heroes in all 50 states will be given the historic privilege of stitching the flag back to its original 13-stripe format using pieces of American flags destined for retirement in each state. Hines donated a flag that was used at the ceremony.

Once the flag is restored and made whole again by the 10th year Anniversary of 9/11, the National 9/11 Flag will become a part of the permanent collection of the National September 11 Memorial Museum being built at the World Trade Center.

VA 2K Run

Thousands of VA employees and Veterans took part in the first VA 2K run in May and June.

More than 600 employees and 100 Veterans participated in the **Hines** VA2K Walk/Roll on June 2nd. Employees took advantage of the great weather to walk with their co-workers and raise awareness of homeless Veterans. The hospital collected hundreds of dollars in cash and gift cards as well as ten huge bins of items for homeless Veterans and employees and Veterans had a great time doing it!

Runners took their mark at the healthy Hines 5K

On a beautiful Saturday morning, hundreds of Hines employees and Veterans donned their walking/running shoes and participated in the Healthy Hines 5K Run/Walk/Roll.

Hank Ruthe, shown left, an employee in the hospital's Fiscal Department, was the winner of the run. The event was free of charge to all participants and included a Kids Run, trophies for overall winners and winners in various age categories, post-race refreshments and a special award ceremony after the event, hosted by Hospital Director Sharon Helman.

"It's great to see so many members of the Hines family out here on a weekend morning exercising and socializing together," said Director Helman as she kicked off the run.

The **Oscar G. Johnson** VA Medical Center hosted the 1st Annual VA 2K Walk and Roll event in support of our nation's homeless Veterans on Thursday, June 2, 2011. The purpose of the VA 2K was to encourage all employees to make healthier lifestyle choices and with physical fitness being one, this 2K was perfect for people of all fitness levels.

It was a beautiful sunny day and approximately 100 people participated in this event, not only getting some exercise and enjoying the weather but also showing their concern for today's homeless Veterans. Participants walked, pushed strollers, used roller blades and assisted those in wheelchairs; it was a truly a walk and roll – exciting event!

This event was advertised to Veterans, volunteers, staff and the general public. Staff and volunteers who participated in the event were encouraged to bring in an item for a homeless Veteran; those who participated opted to offer a cash donation which resulted in raising approximately $300.00 for homeless Veterans.

Jesse Brown's 1st Annual VA 2K Walk and Roll event included three different walk and roll start times between 7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. to accommodate all three shifts; an opening ceremony with the National Anthem sung by an employee, a few remarks shared by the Medical Center Director, and a ribbon cutting following in which the Medical Center Director, Associate Medical Center Director, and Acting Chief of Staff participated; music was played throughout the day; a visor, water and light snacks were provided to the participants; and most importantly, everyone who participated benefitted from the fresh air, exercise and in their support for our nation's homeless Veterans. This event was a huge success due to the organizers' hard work and we look forward to a bigger event next year.

A total of 440 employees at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center turned out for the Department of Veterans Affairs' first VA-2K on June 3rd.

The weather cooperated too, turning significantly cooler that day after several days of stifling heat.

After a rally in the medical center's courtyard, which included an opportunity for staff to donate items for homeless Veterans, walkers were given visors and set off on their walks – two laps around the medical center complex. They were cheered on at each corner by volunteers monitoring the walk. Upon completion, each employee received a bottle of water and "I DID THE VA 2K-2011" pin.

A total of 251 staff also made donations to homeless Veterans valued at almost $4,000.

Network News

Hines

Successful Second Annual Health Fair

Toria Treacy, (left) PA and Karen Clark, NP represented the Hines VA GI & Liver Clinic at the Health Fair. Their booth had a fun game to test your knowledge about your liver & colon

Almost 1,000 Veterans and employees attended the second annual Hines Health Fair. The Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP) Program at Hines coordinated the fair to educate staff and Veterans about the Healthy Living Messages and programs available to our Veterans to improve health.

A total of 38 programs and services throughout the hospital were represented at the fair. Staff were on hand to conduct health screenings, discuss health concerns, and provide information on various hospital programs.

Many employees commented that they were interested to learn about the nine Healthy Living Messages and were especially glad to be able to meet with the various program representatives and gain information about the services available to their patients.

Everyone who attended the fair received a "Health Fair Passport" to provide them with a place to record information they learned at the fair. "We were so impressed with the response from both staff and employees who attended the fair," said Lorry Luscri, Hines HPDP Coordinator. "As a result of the fair, 50 Veterans received lab orders to get an HIV test and many Veterans signed up for My HealthEvet, the MOVE! Program and recreation therapy events. We even enrolled 22 new Veterans in our system at the fair. It was an overwhelming success!"

In addition, more than 120 blood pressure checks were conducted for participants, and 102 participants received a bone density scan. After visiting with the Care Coordination Home Telehealth (CCHT) staff, 22 Veterans expressed interest in enrolling in this program. Recreation Therapy was present to discuss services, and helped over 200 participants make a craft at the fair. Almost 100 employees signed up for the VA's Wellness Is Now (WIN) program after learning about it at the health fair.

One of the highlights of the fair included the conclusion and "weigh out" of the hospital's "Smartest Loser" weight loss contest, coordinated by Nutrition and Food Service. A total of 136 participants (Veterans and staff) completed the contest. In total, 591.2 total pounds were lost (not including those who gained weight) and 221.7 inches were lost (not including those who gained inches). "The Smartest Loser Contest inspired a lot of staff to pay attention to their eating habits and work on improving their health," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "Watching participants weigh out at the health fair and sharing in their excitement over the results was inspiring to all of us."

The fair also included ten minute fitness demos (karate, Zumba, strength training with resistance bands) and short presentations on the Healthy Living Messages. In addition, a healthy cooking demonstration and a relaxation activity were part of the day's activities.

"This successful event was a great way for employees and Veterans to learn about health and interact with staff and programs from all areas of the hospital," Luscri said. "Everyone who attended showed enthusiasm toward improving their health and excitement about future activities at Hines. We plan to have fairs like this in our Community Based Outpatient Clinics in the fall."

31st Annual Wheelchair Games

Veterans of military conflicts ranging from World War II all the way through current Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom participated in the 31st Annual Hines VA Hospital Veteran Wheelchair Games on Saturday, May 14th. Bowling, air rifles, blow darts, field events, and an obstacle course were among the featured events for both ambulatory and wheelchair participants.

The Games kicked off with a moving opening ceremony in front of the hospital. Approximately 70 Veterans participated in this year's activities, which also included horseshoes, karate, basketball shoot, trivia rally, food and fun. All event participants received a medal in a special luncheon medal ceremony.

Many of the participants at the Hines Veterans Games planned to go on to compete in the National Veterans Golden Age Games or the National Wheelchair Games later this year.

"The Hines Wheelchair Games are an inspiring and uplifting event, featuring our nation's heroes whose hard work and dedication is amazing," said Sharon Helman, Hines Hospital Director. "It was a great day for the staff, for our Veterans and for the members of the community who came to watch and cheer on our athletes."

Making our CLC a Home

Veterans in the Hines Community Living Center (CLC) were thrilled when some kids from the hospital's childcare center visited to help them plant flowers in the CLC garden.

Linda Walrath, (above left) RN, assisted the children in preparing flowers to plant in the hospital's Community Living Center garden.

VIP Visitors

Chicago White Sox pitchers Mark Buehrle, John Danks, Chris Sale and Matt Thornton went room to room visiting patients in the Hines Spinal Cord Injury Unit when they visited last month. They thanked our Veterans for their service to the country and even took a moment to stop by and place a stitch in the National 9/11 Flag. Major League Baseball sent a film crew with the players to Hines and did a great story on their visit.

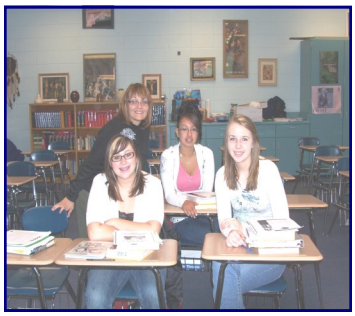
Iron Mountain

Workforce Succession Planning In Progress

Workforce succession planning is in progress at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center.

MaryAnne Gibler, EEO Specialist, has met with over 300 students in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin since January 2011 educating them about the VA opportunities available to them.

The 2017 retirement projections were communicated to them along with the unique job fields that may be available due to these future retirements.



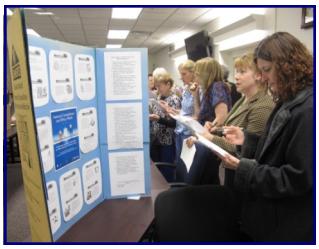
Students also participated in a mock performance based interview that Ms. Gibler conducted with them. Student internships, job shadowing and volunteer opportunities were also shared with the students.

These visits were so successful that the schools visited may make them an annual event.

2011 National Compliance and Integrated Ethics Week

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center celebrated the 2011 National Compliance and Integrated Ethics Week with an Open House on May 3, 2011.

The Open House event included educational storyboards, games and activities, an opportunity for staff to meet with the new Compliance Officer, Rosemary Romick, and to enjoy some light refreshments.



This opportunity gave staff a hands-on experience to make learning about compliance and integrated ethics fun yet allowing them to earn educational credit in the process. Approximately 75 staff attended; they appreciated the hard work that went into organizing this very educational event.

7th Annual Veterans Tribute Ride

The 7th Annual Veterans Tribute Ride included a stop at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center on Saturday, May 28, 2011. This year there were approximately 200 motorcycles that circled the medical center and then parked near the pavilion for a brief program and to meet and greet the Community Living Center (CLC) residents.

The CLC residents look forward to this program each year as the cyclists take the time to thank the Veterans for their service to our country and to spend some quality time with each one.

The CLC residents love to see all the motorcycles and mingle with the riders. This year the was weather was overcast and drizzly but the turnout was tremendous and well received by the Veterans and community.

Jesse Brown

The Price Was Right!

Brian Fondren, (above) RN, a member of JBVAMC's telemetry unit, attended a taping of *The Price is Right* game show and, yes, he was called to "come on down to be the next contestant." The program aired on April 29th and the medical center broadcasted the program in its conference room.

People passing outside the auditorium wondered what the cheering was all about – Brian was on for almost the entire program, winning the "Golden Road" game, spinning the "Big Wheel" (a perfect spin for $1,000) and participating in the "Showcase" Showdown.

He walked away as the show's Grand Prize Winner, receiving an all-inclusive seven-day African Safari for two, a professional camera with tripod and two sand dune buggies.

"Sully" Makes a Visit

"Sully" Sullenberger posed for photos (center) with staff on 5-East inpatient unit staff.

Staff and Veterans waiting in Jesse Brown VAMC's packed auditorium burst into applause on May 13 as Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger – the pilot who safely landed US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009 – walked in.

He had spent the previous hour visiting patients on the medical center's inpatient units and would spend another hour in the auditorium answering questions, posing for photographs and giving autographs.

"I knew I would be in Chicago today and thought about how I could best spend the day," said Sullenberger, a Veteran who had served as a Captain in the United States Air Force. "I couldn't think of a better way than to visit with some Veterans."

Sullenberger provided a detailed description of his thoughts and actions during the brief period of time after his plane struck a flock of large birds and lost power in both engines only two minutes after takeoff. He quickly decided there was no time to return to LaGuardia Airport and that attempting a landing in the Hudson River was his only option. He only had time to tell his 155 passengers "brace for impact."

Sullenberger was quick to credit his military training for his piloting skills and also spoke of the symptoms of post traumatic stress that he suffered after the crash, including sleeplessness and flashbacks. He also said his blood pressure and pulse remained at extremely high levels for several weeks after the incident.

Hygiene System Monitors Hand Washing

Sika Asima, RN, a staff nurse in the ICU holds her freshly-washed hands under a hand wash sensor that sends a wireless "all clean" message to a badge she is wearing.

Jesse Brown VAMC is the first VA hospital in the nation to install a new type of monitoring system that reminds healthcare workers to wash their hands.

The medical center installed the HyGreen Hand Hygiene System earlier this year.

After washing, healthcare workers place their hands under a hand wash sensor that sends a wireless "all clean" message to a badge worn by the employee. A wireless monitor above the patient bed searches for the message. If it is absent, the badge vibrates to remind the staff member to wash before patient contact. All interactions are recorded in a database to monitor compliance with hand washing regulations.

The system was designed to reflect guidelines from leading industry experts, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The Joint Commission.

"This system helps protect our Veterans from the pain and suffering that can result from the spread of infections," said Etta McDuffee, RN, JBVAMC's Infection Prevention Coordinator. "It can also significantly reduce costs since infections can extend hospital stays eight days or more and require antibiotics and possibly surgery.

"The system has received a very positive response from our Veterans and their families, who see how seriously we take the issue of infection control," she continued. "It is effective as a reminder system and also provides a very reliable and objective way to measure compliance."

JBVAMC has always taken a very proactive approach to hand hygiene. A medical center-wide hand washing campaign several years ago that featured posters of JBVAMC's staff holding up their hands, palms forward, to demonstrate cleanliness was considered a Best Practice. The medical center has also been successful in keeping its infection rates exceedingly low.

Madison

IL VFW Auxiliary Leaders Get A Tour

A delegation from the Illinois Department of the Ladies Auxiliary of the VFW tours the Madison VAH's new Community Living Center, now nearing completion in Madison.

VFW Ladies Auxiliary leaders from Illinois got their first close-up view of the Madison VAH's new Community Living Center (CLC) in May. The delegation included the VFWA's VA Voluntary Services representative and deputy representative, along with two other officials from the Department of Illinois.

The Madison CLC is scheduled for completion in September. The project will have 16 beds for rehabilitation, sub-acute and hospice patients, with expansion capacity for an additional 10 beds. The tour highlighted special features incorporated into Madison's CLC, which include a more homelike environment for patients who will use the facility for longer stays than the hospital's acute care patients, but for shorter periods than most long-term facilities provide. The CLC includes four hospice care rooms designed to accommodate visits from family members and even feature a small private outdoor balcony terrace for each room.

In addition to 15 counties in Wisconsin, the Madison hospital operates CBOCs in Rockford and Freeport, IL, and serves five counties in northern Illinois.

Parking Ramp Construction Underway

Construction began in May on a new multi-level parking structure to replace the patient and visitor lot and add 600 parking spaces on the campus.

Work on a much needed and long awaited solution to limited parking at William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital is now underway in Madison, Wis. Construction began May 16 on a new parking structure that will add about 600 parking spaces for hospital patients, staff, visitors and volunteers.

Parking space at the Madison hospital has been so short that many employees have been forced to park off-site, either on surface streets blocks from the hospital or at a Wisconsin state office building more than a mile away.

When the new multi-level parking structure is completed in December, there should be enough on-site space for everyone.

The hospital's parking committee developed a plan to mitigate the inevitable inconvenience of the construction project, which took over the facility's former patient and visitor lot. Patients will still park free, either in a smaller self-parking area or with the use of valet parking. The valet service is the recommended parking strategy for patients, who can be dropped off at the main entrance. Contract valets then park the patient cars in lot formerly used by hospital staff.

A larger number of hospital employees than normal will be forced to park off-site for seven months until construction is completed. Sometime in December, though, the temporary inconvenience should produce a welcome payoff when the entire hospital workforce will be able to park on-site.

In the meantime, everyone is asked to be patient and keep safe as heavy equipment and materials move around the construction site and on the same streets patients will continue using to get to and from the hospital.

SECVA Visits Student Veteran Leaders in Wisconsin

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki visited Madison, Wis., June 3, where he was keynote speaker at the 2011 Leadership Summit hosted by Student Veterans of America.

The Student Veterans of America is a coalition of student Veterans groups on college campuses across the United States. The annual summit brought together the group's leaders to share ideas for improving their chapter operations and local services for their student Veterans.

Sec. Shinseki talked about significant issues facing Veterans, including Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the VA's commitment to these and other issues.

He pointed out the huge investment in Veterans' education and challenged the student vets to make sure they give America a return on this investment—by graduating from their colleges and universities with good educations.

Secretary Eric K. Shinseki speaks to student Veteran leaders from around the country at the 2011 Leadership Summit of Student Veterans of America in Madison, Wis.

The SVA event was held on the campus of the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The Secretary also met briefly with William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital Director Deborah Thompson and with Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, VISN 12 Network Director, who was visiting the Madison VAH.

Milwaukee

Gone But Not forgotten

Sergeant 1st Class John Alberti shown above, solemnly carries the flag back to the podium so it may be presented to the Witmer family.

Family, military and Veterans came to Wood National Cemetery to honor Spec. Michelle Witmer, who was killed in Iraq in 2004 and is buried on the grounds. The Waukesha healthcare chapter of the General Electric Veterans Network organized the event as part of its ongoing efforts to reach out to the VA and honor all military Veterans.

Vince Schwalbe presents the flag to John and Lori Witmer

Witmer, 20, of Berlin, Wis., was serving in Iraq with the 32nd Military Police Company, when she was killed April 9, 2004, in a nighttime attack. Her two sisters, Rachel and Charity, were also serving in Iraq at the time. The GE Veterans Network had a flag specially made for the event by the Eder Flag Company in Oak Creek, Wis. The flag was raised by a 32nd Military Company color guard Friday and then presented to Witmer's mom and dad, John and Lori.

"I can't imagine what the family has gone through with their daughter only seven years gone, and we didn't know if they would want to participate, but they were very gung-ho and wanted to do this," said Vince Schwalbe, who organized the event and presented the flag. "As a Veteran myself, I was thrilled to get this opportunity to honor Michelle and her family for their sacrifices." The ceremony included Christian recording artist Cheryl McCrary, who sang several numbers, including, "God Bless the USA," "God Bless America," and "You Raise Me Up."

The Witmer's said they were grateful people took the time to remember their daughter. "It's an incredible honor, because seven years have gone by, but we don't want to forget, and we are grateful that others haven't forgotten," John Witmer said. "The 32nd MP Company has been a part of our military family."

Sergeant 1st Class John Alberti, who served with Michelle Witmer, said no one hesitated when given the opportunity to participate. "She was a part of us, and a part of our unit, and we want to do this to honor her and her family," said Alberti, who was in charge of the flag detail from the 32nd MP Company. They put on this uniform and leave their family and friends and other jobs to serve their country, and sometimes they pay the ultimate sacrifice."

Passing on Some Wisdom to Our Veterans

Delon Powell was on his way home from Iraq when he stopped into Starbucks in Kuwait for a coffee, biscotti and a little light reading about personal finances. "The guy writing the book wrote that if the average person saved what they spent in one trip to Starbucks, they could be a millionaire in 30 years," he said. "And I looked down at my coffee and biscotti, and I had just spent six bucks on it. That's when I had a small epiphany. Managing money and saving was not a problem for me, but it showed me that everyone has some waste in their budget, and you can find ways to save." The former Army captain who is a patient advocate at the Milwaukee VA, now likes to pass some of that wisdom on to other Veterans. He runs a quarterly personal finance class to give people the basics and help them get on their feet. The four-part series began Thursday, but newcomers can join at any point.

Since his own epiphany in Kuwait, Powell has gone on to keep minimal debt, invest wisely and save where he can. But in his daily job that focuses on Iraq and Afghanistan war Veterans, he found some need the basics before they get to that point. "We were seeing a lot of people who were having financial problems – people of all ages," he said. "Some people just never had to think about it. They never knew they could get a free credit report, or how to read it. We've had some guys who have stayed (in the domiciliary) for an extensive stay, and they're getting compensation and disability payments, but didn't have any money saved, but all their basic essentials were covered. So the idea is to teach the basics of building a budget so people can think about that and get on their feet."

Powell doesn't tell people what to do. Instead, he shows them what they're spending, "and that's the eye-opening experience, and then they want to change." He remembers one person in a previous class who was always broke and didn't know why. "So we start tracking everything he did from the time he woke up, until four or five hours later at lunch. And in that time, he had spent $25 to $50 a day – it started with coffee, and then an energy drink and snack, then lunch. You add that up every day and it's a lot of money. It's one thing to tell someone to save 10 percent of their money, but they won't do it. When you show them what is being spent, it's a little different." And just because someone doesn't make a lot of money isn't an excuse to save a little bit of money. "Even the person who makes minimum wage might think they can't save, but they have money for a trip in the summer, or when they want to buy something. They might have a flat screen TV, or a nice cell phone. It's about decisions," he said.

Powell said if he had to narrow down his financial advice to three tips, it would be:

* Save something! You never know when the rainy day will come.
* Watch out for small habits! What does that daily coffee, soda or lunch cost you over a month?
* It's always better to pay cash! You are more attentive when parting with hard-earned cash.

There is no emotional attachment to plastic. Although first priority for the personal finance class is given to Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, it is open to all Veterans and Veteran employees at the VA.

Final Reclaiming Our Heritage Celebration

Thousands converged on the Milwaukee VA campus June 4 and 5 to take in the 10th and final Reclaiming Our Heritage celebration and Positively Patriotic Parade. The event, started by VA employee Laura Rinaldi to honor Civil War history, has grown into a huge event, with re-enactors from almost every period of American history taking part in the festivities, honoring the past and educating people about how life really was way back when.

Thousands converged on the Milwaukee VA campus June 4 and 5 to take in the 10th and final Reclaiming Our Heritage celebration and Positively Patriotic Parade.

Volunteers from Reclaiming Our Heritage, who organize the entire event, announced earlier that this would be the last one of its kind. "It has been a wonderful 10 years," Rinaldi said. "The reality is the core group of loyalists who do this every year are 10 years older, and the work is physically and mentally exhausting. The usable ground is shrinking because of the very nature of what we do at the VA to take care of Veterans. So we decided it's time to tie it up, put a ribbon in it and go out with dignity and style."

No doubt, the crew lived up to that lofty goal, and people weren't disappointed. The entire campus served as a virtual time capsule, with World War II Veterans in one area, just around the corner from

Revolutionary War and the Colonial period. Civil War troops – including the seldom-heard-of U.S. Colored Troops – mingled with soldiers from the Vietnam and Korean era in another. "We do it to enlighten people about our history," said Terry Sorchy, who, along with his wife, Nancy, represented the Colonial period. "We've also been Civil War re-enactors, but that is usually the most represented. People generally don't like to read books about this nowadays, so this gives them hands-on history that they remember. We don't just tell the stories about the famous people, but the real, everyday people who lived their lives."

A few feet away, Shawn Clark, and his wife, Cindy, representing an Army and Women's Air Corps soldier from World War II, took in the scenery. "This is just amazing and it brings history to life," Cindy Clark said. "Kids today might not even hear about this in school, or if they do, they get one hour of one day." Many re-enactors were once or still are serving in the military today. For others, they may never have served, but do this to honor their ancestors who served and preserve that history. "Personally, my dad was a World War II Veteran, and those guys are my heroes," said Bob Blecke, who was part of the Milwaukee Historical Re-enactment Society. I admire them because they faced so many dangers and did so many dangerous things, and then came back and picked up and led normal lives. We're losing those Veterans at a rate of 1,000 a day and we need to tell their stories.

"I had one Marine Veteran from World War II come up and he asked if he could hold the M-1," Becke added. "His face lit up and the years melted away from his face. He couldn't stop smiling."

Raymond Schmidt, right, a Marine who served in the Korean War near the DMZ from 1952 to 1955, checks out some of the World War II items on display by Kun Kulik. "This is just wonderful," he said. "I've been coming the last five years. It brings back a lot of memories -- most of them good."

Reclaiming Our Heritage features re-enactors from every military era of U.S. history (and some other eras as well), including this couple – Eric Houtman and his fiancé, Emme Tomtschik -- who came to represent the Civil War period.

Military units line up in front of Old Main in preparation for the Positively Patriotic Parade to kick off the 10th and final Reclaiming Our Heritage

Bike to Work

Fed up with four-bucks-a-gallon gas? Yeah, we all are. But lean a little closer to the page and we'll whisper a secret that can make your commute to and from work virtually free. OK, no need to whisper. We'll tell everyone. As a bonus, this idea frees up parking spots, promotes good cardio health, and will help those pants fit a little better. It's called the bicycle, and a growing number of employees are joining the trend.

The extension of the Hank Aaron Trail, which runs through the VA campus, has made it easier for employees to bike into work and has opened up the Menomonee Valley for exercise and fun. Pharmacist Jennifer Koch is one of our avid biking employees and said it's addictive. "After I rode my bike to work the first time, I was hooked," she said. "It only takes me 10 minutes longer than driving and it allows me to get some fresh air and exercise and helps me jump start my day. On Brewer game days I can get home just as fast on my bike because I can avoid all the traffic by taking the Hank Aaron trail."

While some employees live so far away that biking in isn't practical, but for many others it may be easier than you think. Another employee who rides frequently is Amy Thompto, a registered dietitian. "I bike to work for many reasons. We all know that parking is limited on the grounds, but I can always find a place to lock up my bike," she said. "I'm also saving money by using less gasoline while burning calories, which helps me to maintain a healthy weight. My 15-minute ride into work wakes me up and allows me to start my day with a positive attitude." Those words were echoed by Beth Paulsen, a supervisor who works in Transcription. When I ride my bike to work I feel prepared for my day, my attitude is positive and it saves me money. It is just a great way to commute."

To get more people involved, the Bike to Work Committee is encouraging employees to join the Wisconsin Bike Challenge. This is free and the simple opportunity to promote wellness, team building and workplace biking. You can register at www.challenge.bfw.org, and our team name is VA Bike Committee.

As part of the program, our VA will compete against other companies and groups to see who is burning the most calories, biking the greatest number of miles, saving the most gas and potentially having the greatest "green" impact on the environment.

Bike to Work Week was June 6 to 10, and biking enthusiasts used that time to encourage more employees to use pedal power.

Lovell FHCC

Free Smoke Cessation Assistance

To improve health and safety for employees and patients, the Lovell FHCC is increasing communication and enforcement of the smoking cessation program.

"All forms of tobacco are harmful and contribute to cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease," said Mitch Goodman, Lovell FHCC Mental Health Psychologist and Smoking Cessation Clinician.

"Quitting smoking is the single most important thing a person can do to improve their health and protect the health of their family."

Goodman explained that the Lovell FHCC provides assistance to employees who wish to quit smoking. "We offer employees free nicotine replacement products, such as patches and gum," said Goodman. "We also can assist by providing classes for those who want to quit. The classes offer ongoing support and a variety of added tools to help a person quit."

Currently, the FHCC tobacco-use policy only allows smoking 35-feet from buildings, or within designated smoking shelters. Additionally, all used cigarette butts must be distinguished within designated receptacles.

John Samples, Lovell FHCC Chief of Police and Safety, noted that rising outdoor temperatures often results in staff and patients smoking outside. In turn, this can lead to increased violations of the tobacco-use policy.

"The intent of this new initiative is to simply promote a safe work environment for everyone," said Samples. "To make it work, everyone must get involved. If a person notices tobacco-use violation, simply advise a person who is smoking within 35-feet of an entrance that they should not be doing so. If the person continues the violation, politely ask them their name and report them to the police. Contact like this is paramount for the policy to be effective."

Military personnel have additional tobacco-use restrictions, explained MA1 Mark Robbins, Lovell FHCC Naval Security Force Leading Petty Officer. "Military personnel are prohibited from using tobacco in front of patients, as it detracts from military professionalism," said Robbins. "In addition, according to Navy Instruction 5100.13E, uniformed personnel are only authorized to smoke within designated smoking locations."

Samples noted that the increased awareness is not about punishing violators, but more about promoting a healthy work environment, decreasing secondhand smoke and keeping the facility clean.

"We all have to work and live in the same area," said Samples. "The emphasis on this policy is not about punishment. It's about common courtesy."

Tomah

21st Annual Fishing Tournament for Veterans

7th graders—Tomah Middle School 7th graders and Veterans enjoying a day of fishing.

The 21st Annual Fishing Tournament for Veterans was held on May 18, 2011, at the Fishing Pond located on the Tomah VA campus. Sponsors of this outstanding hospital-wide activity were the American Legion, 7th District, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Genoa Fish Hatchery. Tomah VA patients enjoyed a morning of fishing, prizes, fried fish, and the company of about 100 seventh grade students from the Tomah Middle School.

Someone You Should Know

Jesse Brown

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is pleased to welcome its new Medical Center Director, Mr. Michael A. Anaya, Sr., whose appointment was effective on Monday, June 6, 2011.

Mr. Anaya is the former Chief Executive Officer/ President of ANSRGroup, LCC, located in Fort Morgan, Colorado. He is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

A 22-year Veteran of the armed forces, Mr. Anaya started his military career as an enlisted United States Air Force Pharmacy Technician. While on active duty, he obtained an undergraduate degree in Healthcare Administration from Wayland Baptist University and a Master of Public Administration degree from Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, TX.

Afterwards, he accepted a commission in the Medical Service Corps for the United States Navy and served in numerous operational leadership positions in the military healthcare system and on the staff of the Surgeon General of the Navy, Bureau of Naval Personnel and TRICARE, prior to retiring from active duty as a Lieutenant Commander in 2001.

This is Mr. Anaya's first appointment in VA and he is enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve. "As a Veteran, I am most appreciative of those who are meeting and caring for the men and women who have sacrificed while serving our great Nation," he said. "I recognize this is the spirit that reflects our strength and character."

JBVAMC's previous medical center director, James Jones, retired in May 2010.

Milwaukee

Beth Taylor is the Milwaukee VA's new Associate Director of Patient and Nursing Services.

She's come a long ways from tending soybeans, planting corn and raising hogs, but the farm girl is never really far from Beth Taylor, the Milwaukee VA's associate director of patient and nursing services.

This December, she said with a knock on the wooden table in front of her, she'll get her doctorate in health administration, which raises the dilemma of calling her "Nurse" or calling her "Doctor." You can call me Beth," she smiled. "I'm still a farm girl at heart. I actually a 10-year member of the 4-H, and financed my undergraduate degree by showing cattle. Once you're a farm girl. You're always a farm girl."

Joining the nursing ranks was just part of the family business. Her mother was a nurse, her aunt was a nurse, and she started in the medical profession at 15 as a candy striper. Since then she has worked most positions within nursing, including a midnight shift in cardiac care.

She also has given back as a lecturing fellow for 14 years for the undergraduate and graduate nursing programs at Saginaw Valley State University.

Taylor took over her position in May, after serving in the Office of Nursing Services for Research and Academics, and temporary posts at the San Francisco and St. Louis VAs. This new job fit perfectly, since her husband, Mark, got a position as a hospital administrator at nearby Columbia St. Mary's. Though she has been in nursing since 1980, only nine of those years have been in the VA. She initially came into the VA in 1996, left to take over a consulting job, then came back to the fold, when she had the chance to work with a friend.

The VA, she said, is her way of continuing a military tradition. "Actually, our family has served in every war back to the Revolutionary War. Even my father, while he was a farmer, spent 10 years in the Army Reserves. I never served, so this is my way of serving," she said. "Really, Veterans are the most deserving of patients, and we owe a lot to them. To be able to serve them, after they defended our country, means a lot to me." And while being at the top still means a lot of time in the office and a lot of paperwork, Taylor said she has the benefit of getting out and interacting with others.

"If I have a tough day, I like to find a Veteran to help. Interacting with the patients keep me grounded," she said. "It reminds me that even though I might be having a bad day, it's not nearly as bad as what some people are going through, and we are here to help them."

North Chicago

You haven't made it in the eyes of Dr. Sarah Fouse until you "reach back to bring someone else up."
And bringing others "up" is precisely what Fouse does every day at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center.

Fouse who has reported to work at the North Chicago location for 43 years, is the new associate director of patient services and the nurse in charge of the sprawling medical facility.

Fouse is directly responsible for all nursing care delivery at Lovell FHCC, the nation's first integrated Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs medical facility. Education, geriatrics, the Community Living Center, rehabilitative medicine, customer service, supply processing and distribution, and ancillary services to include pharmacy, audiology and speech, pathology, pastoral services, and nutrition and food services, all fall under her purview.

"It's not about you making it to the top," Fouse said on a recent afternoon when she cleared her calendar "to catch up" on paperwork and spend some time making rounds. "Somebody had to help you," she said, naming her husband of 44 years as her "number one fan" and supporter, followed by many friends, co-workers and faculty members along the way.

Education has played a pivotal role in Fouse's climb from her first job as a mental health nursing assistant. She got that job in 1968 at what was then the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Hospital. Since then, she has held many positions at the facility including associate chief nurse of mental health services and clinical coordinator for mental health.

"I did it the hard way," she said, listing all the schooling she fit in while raising a family and working full time. "My whole life I've been going back to school." She started with schooling to become a licensed practical nurse and went from there, to a bachelor's degree, a master's, and finally she earned a doctorate in nursing in 2007 from the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. And she's not done yet with school. "My ultimate goal is to get an MBA," she said, "so I can help my church with finances."

Her church is the Greater Grace Temple Church of God and Christ in Racine, Wis., where she is a longtime resident. Her future MBA classes, she noted, will have to be on Thursday nights, because every other night is packed with church and volunteer commitments. One of those commitments is the two times a week she conducts a jail ministry at the Racine County Jail, where she counsels men and women on anger management "from a Christian perspective," she said. In keeping with her motto of "bringing someone else up," Fouse mentors women at her church, as well as nursing students. She and another nurse provide an annual scholarship through the Racine-Kenosha Black Nurses' Association.

The nurses and other staff members she manages at the Lovell FHCC know they can call Fouse for anything, day or night. "I've done everything the staff is doing, and I *can* do it. I can help escort a patient, or whatever else they need … they know they can call me. "When asked if they do call her, she laughed and said, "No." But she doesn't wait for the phone to ring. For example, after sitting down in her office to be interviewed, one of her first comments was, "Guess what I just did? I got to feed a patient," she said, raising her fist with a silent cheer.

Patients have always come first at the North Chicago facility, she said, long before "patient-centered care" became the center's mantra. That fact, as well as the myriad of opportunities available at the facility, has kept her in North Chicago. "And I like what I'm doing and am having fun doing it. When I'm no longer having fun, then I'll leave."

Fond Farewell

Tomah Director Retires After 33 Years of Service

Network Director, Jeffrey A. Murawsky, MD (right) presents Jerry Molnar a Certificate of Commendation

"I didn't know it 33 years ago when I started, but I know it now, said Jerry Molnar. Serving Veterans is the most honorable profession there is. It is often difficult to grasp the enormity of their sacrifice, but I am so thankful to you, the employees and volunteers, for dedicating your lives to serving this higher purpose.

I'd like to share with you an excerpt of a letter sent to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki by one of our Veterans. It is a wonderful tribute to the work that you do here."

"From the minute I entered the door of the medical center, I was treated with respect and dignity, care and concern. From the young lady at the sign-in desk to the Nurses, Physician Assistants, Doctors and Radiological Technicians; all ensured I was being assessed for exceptional medical care...the Transport gentleman was as concerned about my welfare as the medical staff...Housekeeping made me feel like I was part of their special family… So rest assured you have individuals at the Tomah VA Medical Center that go above the call of duty for which you, as the Secretary, should be extremely proud."

At his retirement tea he thanked his employees "for their dedication to our Veterans. It has been an honor to serve with you."

Chief of Staff From Iron Mountain VA Medical Center Transitioning To A New Duty Station

Chief of Staff, Bilal Chaudhry, MD, departed the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center for a new appointment as the Associate Chief of Staff for Education and Operations at the St. Louis VA Medical Center effective June 19, 2011.

Dr. Chaudhry had been with the Iron Mountain facility for approximately 2 ½ years and his departure will be a tremendous loss to the medical center but we wish him success in his new career endeavor.

Rewards and Recognition

Associate Director Named "Woman of Excellence" by Chicago Newspaper

Michelle Blakely, Associate Director for the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, was selected as one of 2011's "50 Women of Excellence" by the *Chicago Daily Defender*, which presents the annual award to recognize the important contributions African-American women make to the Chicago community and business world.

Blakely has served Veterans as a leader in VA medical centers for over 23 years. She was nominated by Jesse Brown VA Medical Center employees, who cited her volunteer work for Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers and Sisters of America, the Young Men's Christian Association and as a Court-appointed Special Advocate for at-risk children. She was profiled in the Defender's 5th annual "Women of Excellence" section in its May 3rd edition and honored at their annual banquet on May 6th.

Iron Mountain Medical Center Wins National Award For Environmental Achievement

Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center (OGJVAMC) has been honored with a 2011 Partner for Change - with Distinction Award from Practice Greenhealth, a national membership organization for health care facilities committed to environmentally responsible operations. The award is one of the organization's seven environmental excellence awards given each year to honor outstanding environmental achievements in the health care sector. The Partner for Change - with Distinction Award recognizes healthcare facilities that have achieved improvements in their mercury elimination, waste reduction, and pollution prevention programs (over and above the Partner for Change basic criteria).

This includes at least 15% recycling, a more extensive sustainability program, and a show of leadership in the local community and/or in the health care sector. "The environmental excellence awards recognize success stories," said Anna Gilmore Hall, Executive Director of Practice Greenhealth, and "OGJVAMC is a successful model of how health care facilities can develop and implement pollution prevention programs to greatly improve the health of their patients, staff and community."

"We are so pleased to have our accomplishments recognized at the national level," said Greg Haslow, IH/GEMS Coordinator. "OGJVAMC is committed to reducing our environmental impact and we are continually monitoring our progress to improve our performance; thus, receiving this award is confirmation that we are on the right track." As part of this year's award, 100 trees were planted in the honor of the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center. This village project is being implemented to save the homes and way of life of people in Tanzania, a country devastated by deforestation and increasingly global climate change.

Madison Administrative Fellow Wins 1st Place

Priyanka Randeria, Administrative Fellow won first place in the Graduate Healthcare Administration Training Program poster competition at this year's American College of Healthcare Executives Congress on Healthcare Leadership. Her poster project was development of an auditing tool called the VERA Toolkit. As a result of winning this competition, Randeria gave a presentation at the VA Session for an audience of over 400 senior VA leaders, including the Under Secretary for Health, the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations & Management, VISN and Hospital Directors.

Ms. Randeria is pictured with, from left, Jonathan Gardner, FACHE Chairman, GHATP Board; Ms. Deborah Thompson, Director Madison VAH; William C. Schoenhard, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, Veterans Health Administration; Robert A. Petzel, M.D., Under Secretary for Health

National Emergency Exercise

In May, Medical Centers in the VISN participated in the VA National Disaster Exercise

Hines

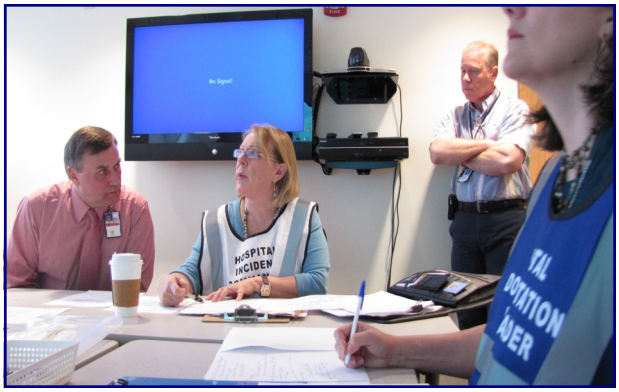
"Patriot" Deploys at Hines

As a Federal Coordinating Center, Hines plays a key community role in the event of a disaster. The hospital deployed its impressive Patriot Mobile Medical Surge Unit as part of the VA National Disaster Exercise in May. Staff were also on hand to practice their skills in the event of an emergency.

"Our employees were so impressed with the capabilities of our new Patriot Medical Surge Unit and were energized and excited to participate in the drill," said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. "It's a great feeling to be a part of the bigger picture. If there is ever a natural disaster or any other reason for us to utilize the Patriot, our own Hines employees will be playing a critical role in the community. This exercise brought home the importance of our role and gave us the chance to practice."

In the event of an emergency the Patriot Mobile Medical Surge Unit, along with Hines employees to staff it, would be deployed to O'Hare airport. Patients flown to Chicago for medical treatment would be triaged in the unit and sent to community hospitals, including Hines, Jesse Brown VAMC and the James A. Lovell Federal Hines Care Facility. Jennifer Gutowski, Assistant Director, was the Hines incident commander during the exercise. "This year's disaster exercise was a particularly valuable experience for Hines," she said. "We learned so much about the various things we will need to prepare for and address in the event of an actual emergency situation. Having the Patriot at Hines, raises the level of responsibility and importance that our hospital plays in relationship to the community. This was a great way for us to understand and practice exactly what that means."

Madison



Craig Schuetz, left, emergency preparedness coordinator at the Madison VAH, and Julie Shinn, chief of inpatient nursing services, work together during emergency exercise Vigilant Guard in May. Shinn served as the hospital's incident commander for the exercise.

William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital practiced its role in the National Disaster Medical System May 18 in Madison. As part of a national emergency management exercise called Vigilant Guard, the Madison hospital exercised its ability to receive patients diverted from other hospitals when their patient loads surge or when a natural disaster forces them to move their own patients to other hospital facilities.

The May 18 exercise combined two major events that impacted Madison.

First was an earthquake along the New Madrid seismic zone that extends from northeast Arkansas along the Mississippi River to southern Illinois, with the city of New Madrid, Mo., at its center. Heavy casualties from the simulated earthquake forced victims to be diverted to hospitals throughout the Midwest, including Milwaukee. As Milwaukee hospitals approached capacity, the Madison VAH stood ready to assist; and when Milwaukee's capacity was exceeded, simulated "paper" patients were diverted 75 miles west to Madison.

If that weren't enough, flooding along western Wisconsin's Mississippi River banks was threatening the state's own hospitals. La Crosse, Wis., hospitals moved simulated "paper" patients to other locations, including five to the Madison VAH.

Milwaukee

Doctors, nurses and other VA troops jumped into action May 18 to treat disaster "victims" as part of a national exercise to respond to a Midwest exercise.

The Zablocki VA Medical Center sent four doctors, a pharmacist and about 20 nurses to the 128th Air Refueling Wing at the Milwaukee airport to receive the exercise patients, help triage them, and then send them onto hospitals throughout the community.

The exercise scenario centered around a 7.7 magnitude earthquake near Marked Tree, Ark., and another 6.0 magnitude earthquake near Mt. Carmel, IL, which caused catastrophic damage to at least eight states in the Midwest. Officials said this area does actually fall along a major earthquake fault line which has seen severe earthquake activity about every 100 years. The last actual, big quake was in 1811.

As part of the exercise, the president declared the area a disaster zone, and as many as 160 patients had to be airlifted to the Milwaukee area because other hospitals were overrun.

The receiving part of the drill took place inside one of the hangers at the 128th. The environment resembled a moving colorful quilt, as each team -- Security, Planning, Treatment and Transport all had bright vests designating their role. The triage process was also color based, from the green stable area to yellow serious and red critical care.

"I love to see the interaction between the various departments here, the Milwaukee Fire Department, the Air National Guard, the various hospitals and the American Red Cross volunteers," said Dr. Jeff Green, the director of the VA Emergency Department, who was on scene at the airport. "In a real crisis we will need to come together quickly, this practice prepares us for the real thing."

Some of the VA's domiciliary patients played the part of casualties, along with airmen from the 128th Air Refueling Wing.

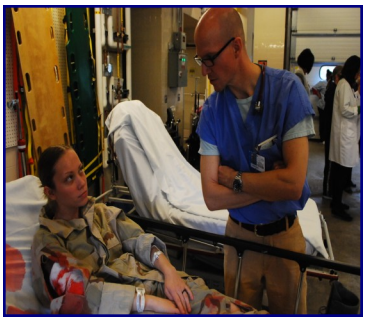
At least 10 of the exercise patients were taken to the Zablocki Emergency Department to test readiness in the hospital itself.

Keith Gillespie, currently living in the Domiciliary, volunteered to be an earthquake victim. His enthusiasm was evident in the role he played -- a 74-year-old man with dementia, who lost a hearing aid in the earthquake and then had a heart attack after being triaged. "I am glad to help with this important drill," he said. "I tried to take the role seriously and act it out as it was designed."

Dennis Martch, also residing at the Domiciliary, said the work as a patient was reminiscent of other jobs he has held. "In two of my previous jobs, with General Mills and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, I served on their emergency response teams," he said. Martch played the role of a 71-year-old man, one week post-op from hip surgery, with a suspected a heart attack.

Dr. Vickie Wiese, a psychologist in Domiciliary 123, is also an American Red Cross volunteer. She was serving in the role of a mental health provider as victims were triaged at the 128th. Wiese has real-world experience with disasters, helping Hurricane Katrina move to Milwaukee.

Back at the Zablocki emergency department, more doctors and nurses stood by to bring in and further treat the patients, said Sharon Wolf, Emergency Department program manager. "We have to triage the patients again because their condition may have changed in transport," she said. "Having an exercise like this is good because it tests our capabilities to do something like this for real, and there is good and bad. We learn what works well, and what we can improve on."



For Emergency Department Dr. Daniel Ross, the exercise was an abrupt welcome to his new job at Zablocki. He previously worked as an ED doctor at an Aurora hospital, and recently joined the VA staff. "I've been working in emergency rooms for 15 years, so we do these kinds of drills constantly," he said. "It's really the only way to keep all these skills sharp, because you don't get the chance to practice them every day. You learn something each time. Otherwise, when it really hits the fan, if you aren't ready, and you don't practice, it can be complete chaos."

National Nurses Week

VA Medical Centers celebrated National Nurses Week in May

Hines

Each year the VA Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing is given to individuals who have been nominated by their colleagues for outstanding service to our Veterans at Hines VA Hospital. The nominees go through a rigorous review and are selected based on best characteristics and the highest level of dedication to the nursing profession. The 2011 Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing winners are: Registered Nurse: (expanded role) Diane Kernan-Schroeder, APN, CNS, BC-ADM, CDE-Diabetes Clinical Nurse Specialist and Certified Diabetes Educator and (staff role) Marian Tully, RN – staff nurse Primary Care; Licensed Practical Nurse: Camille D'Antonio-8th Floor Cardiology Central; and Health Care Technician: Nicole Williams-Outpatient Surgical Clinic.

The winners were honored during the Nurses' Week, Nursing Recognition and Award Program on May 11 at Hines Building 9 Auditorium. Associate Director, Patient Care Services, Carol A. Gouty, RN, MSN, PhD, NE-BC and Hospital Director, Sharon M. Helman, MBA presented the recognition plaques and gifts to the winners.

Iron Mountain

Andrea Collins, Associate Director, Nursing and Patient Care Service, Ann Ghere, RN, and Beth Hoffman, LPN (Doreen Onkalo – absent)

Three nurses at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center were honored with Excellence in Nursing Awards during the National Nurses Week celebration. Anne E. Ghere, RN; Beth A. Hoffman, LPN; and Doreen L. Onkalo, NA earned 2011 Nursing Excellence Awards due to their dedication to the nursing profession and to serving our nation's Veterans. They are outstanding members of our health care team and a true asset to the VA.

North Chicago

Four nurses from the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center were recognized at the Nurses Week closing ceremony May 5 for Excellence in Nursing. The nurses were acknowledged from their professional categories at the annual ceremony:

Cynthia Gunnarson, Lovell FHCC Nurse and Magnet Coordinator, was recognized in the Nurse in Expanded Role category.

Makayla Downs, Lovell FHCC Staff Nurse was recognized in the Staff Nurse Role category.

Anna Chiapete, Lovell FHCC Licensed Practical Nurse, was recognized in the Licensed Practical Nurse category.

Otis Martin Lovell FHCC Nursing Assistant, was recognized in the Nursing Assistant category.

Dr. Sarah Fouse, Lovell FHCC Associate Director for Patient Services and Nurse Executive, presents an annual award for Nursing Excellence to Makayla Downs, Lovell FHCC Staff Nurse, while Patrick Sullivan, Lovell FHCC Director, applauds.

Gunnarson, Downs and Martin was further recognized in their respective categories for the Veterans Integrated Service Network 12 region. They will compete nationally with additional Veterans Affairs regional nurses.

Chiapete, Lovell FHCC Licensed Practical Nurse and resident of Union Grove, Wisc., noted that she was genuinely surprised by the recognition. “I was really shocked when they announced my name,” said Chiapete. “We all work hard every day, focusing on our patients and their families -- but it is truly an honor to be recognized.”

Addressing the crowd of nurses at the ceremony, U.S. Navy Capt. Kathleen Michel, Lovell FHCC Associate Director of Fleet Medicine, expressed her gratitude. “My sincere thanks for all you have done to improve the lives of our patients,” said Michel. “My thanks seems so small compared to all you have individually and collectively done, but it comes from my heart.”

Michel’s sentiment was similarly expressed by Dr. Sarah Fouse, Lovell FHCC Associate Director for Patient Services and Nurse Executive. “Nursing is the heart of healthcare,” she said to the nurses at the ceremony. “The desire to go beyond what is asked or expected is a gift that rare individuals give their colleagues and their organizations. All things can be taught, but extra effort comes not from a book, but from the heart. We are better together.”

First Swing Golf Clinic Helps Disabled Veterans

Don Zommer (left) is an amputee, but that didn’t stop him from giving back to the game he loves. As an instructor for the National Amputee Golf Association (NAGA), he travels around the country giving lessons to therapists, PGA pros and others on how to teach and encourage the disabled to learn, or re-learn, the game of golf-not only because just about every physically challenged individual, regardless of age, is able to play, but also because it contributes dramatically to the individual’s emotional and physical well-being, instilling self-confidence and pride in personal achievement.

The First Swing program began in 1988 and was developed and perfected by a double below knee amputee, Bob Wilson, NAGA Executive Director. NAGA has over 2,500 members nationwide and is sponsored by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Charitable Trust, the PGA and the USGA.

“We have instructors from all over the United States,” said Zommer. “It’s an all volunteer force. We brought this in to show that golf can be therapeutic and show how people can do things they have never done. It’s totally, totally rewarding!”

Tomah VA Veteran, Mike Sapp (swinging the club), a recent amputee, agrees. I don’t think I’ll have any trouble being active,” said Sapp. “I understand there is support here and look forward to getting back to doing whatever it is I want to do.”

After completing rehabilitation in Tomah, Sapp intends to visit his family in Utah and hopes to ski again.

“In fact, the VA has a program that’ll teach you how to do that,” offered Sapp referring to the Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, an event sponsored by the VA and DAV held annually in Snowmass, Colorado.

The Tomah VA golf clinic consisted of morning instruction for therapists and afternoon instruction for Veterans.

“We hope to incorporate golf therapy into our rehabilitation activities for our Veterans,” said Tomah VA physical therapist Kelly Joyce. “We have a beautiful campus and golf course to play.”

“This is a great example of partnerships changing the lives of those who’ve served and sacrificed. In this case, the DAV Charitable Service Trust, NAGA and VA are all working together to open new possibilities.

CORE VALUES

INTEGRITY - Act with high morale principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

COMMITMENT - Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

ADVOCACY - Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

RESPECT - Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

EXCELLENCE - Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

CHARACTERISTICS

TRUSTWORTHY - VA earns the trust of those it serves -every day-through the actions of all employees. They provide care, benefits, and services with compassion, dependability, effectiveness, and transparency.

ACCESSIBLE - VA engages and welcomes Veterans and other beneficiaries, facilitating their use of the entire array of its services. Each interaction will be positive and productive.

QUALITY - VA provides the highest standard of care and services to Veterans and beneficiaries while managing the cost of its programs and being efficient stewards of all resources entrusted to it by the American people. VA is a model of unrivalled excellence due to employees who are empowered, trusted by their leaders, and respected for their competence and dedication.

INNOVATIVE - VA prizes curiosity and initiative, encourages creative contributions from all employees, seeks continuous improvement, and adapts to remain at the forefront in knowledge, proficiency, and capability to deliver the highest standard of care and services to all of the people it serves.

AGILE - VA anticipates and adapts quickly to current challenges and new requirements by continuously assessing the environment in which it operates and devising solutions to better serve Veterans, other beneficiaries, and Service members.

INTEGRATED - VA links care and services across the Department; other federal, state, and local agencies; partners; and Veterans Services Organizations to provide useful and understandable programs to Veterans and other beneficiaries. VA's relationship with the Department of Defense is unique, and VA will nurture it for the benefit of Veterans and Service members.

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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