



## One Team Chicago



*One Team Chicago...Joining Forces to Defeat Veteran Homelessness*

Professional Chicago sports players and more than 70 community, government and faith-based organizations recently joined Hines VA Hospital and the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in kicking off a huge initiative to end homelessness among Veterans in Chicago.

Last October, VA in Chicago launched a campaign called "One Team Chicago...Joining Forces to Defeat Veteran Homelessness." The campaign focuses on uniting all the right "players" in the fight to end Veteran homelessness.

Representatives from the Chicago Bulls, Chicago Blackhawks and Chicago White Sox were present at the kick-off to help VA launch One Team Chicago.

Chicago sports legends Sidney Green, Denis Savard and Minnie Minoso joined the VA to launch the initiative. "The words 'homeless' and 'Veteran' should never be in the same sentence," said former Chicago Bull Sidney Green, who spoke at the kickoff.

Green, who was with the Bulls in the mid-1980s, was brought together with Savard, who played with the Blackhawks in the 1980s and mid-1990s, and Minoso, a White Sox star leftfielder starting in the 1950s for the effort. All three players were thrilled to join with the VA

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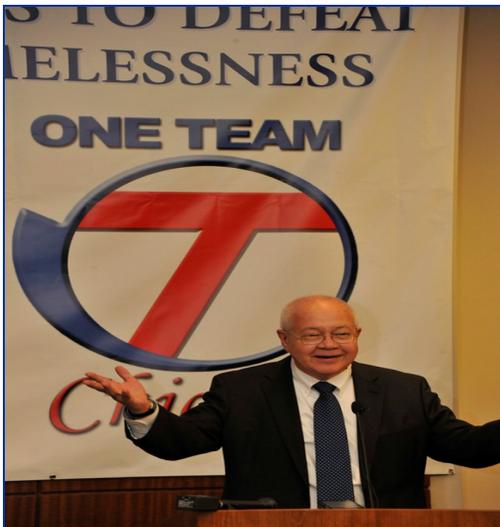
All three players were thrilled to join with the VA to support ending homelessness among Veterans in the Chicago area.

Savard surprised everyone at the event when he announced that the Savard Foundation was pledging to donate \$5,000 to the cause. Other participants at the event included the Honorable Judge Laurence Fox from the Veterans Court in Cook County and Patrick Cano, from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In total, more than 300 people attended the kick-off event and joined the team to end homelessness.

Immediately following the kick-off, the various agencies involved met to develop a "game plan" for One Team Chicago to address the issues of homeless Veterans.

"VA's goal is to end Veteran homelessness once and for all," said Michael Anaya, Director of the Jesse Brown VAMC. "To accomplish this goal, we need the entire Chicago community to join together to get our Veterans off the streets. Combining the resources and expertise of community, government, and faith-based organizations in the area, allows us to organize our efforts more effectively," he said.

"After putting their lives on the line in service to our country, our Veterans deserve the best support and assistance that we can provide," said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. "We are proud to launch this initiative bringing everyone together for such an important mission."



*Dr. Robert Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health, was the enthusiastic keynote speaker at the Hines and Jesse Brown One Team Chicago Kickoff Event.*

"Those who have served this nation as Veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope," said Dr. Petzel.

Nationwide, VA hosted similar initiatives and kick off events in 28 communities to highlight local services for homeless Veterans, their families and those at risk of becoming homeless.

He added, "Working with our partners in state and local government, the non-profit and the private sectors, we can restore our homeless Veterans and their families to the lives of dignity they've earned."

For more homeless and welcome home events that took place throughout our Network please see page 19.

## Network News

### Hines

#### 90 Years of Service



*Former Hines Directors Nathan Geraths and Max Lewis joined current Hines Director Sharon Helman at the Hines 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration*

Hines VA Hospital celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> year of service to America's Veterans with a special anniversary celebration in early November. The celebration focused on the hospital's rich history and numerous local, national and international accomplishments over the years.

Hundreds of employees and members of the community attended the ceremony including former Hines Directors, Max Lewis and Nathan Geraths, and Michael Anaya and Patrick Sullivan, Directors of the Jesse Brown VAMC and the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center.

“This is a very special day in Hines History,” said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. “Today we pause, with our current and former VA family members, to remember all the Veterans who have been treated here. I feel especially proud to be Director of a facility with such an incredible history.”

Hines opened its doors to Veterans in November of 1921 and has undergone numerous changes and improvements over the years. The front of the hospital features a statue of George Dilboy, the first Greek American to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. Three descendants of George Dilboy attended the Hines 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration and offered their congratulations to the hospital staff for the work they do in support of America’s Veterans.

A very special photo slide show of *Hines Through the Years* and a video of Hines employees discussing what they like best about working at Hines, were highlights of the Anniversary ceremony. Veterans, visitors and employees can still view these special products and learn more about the incredible history of Hines by going to <http://www.hines.va.gov/about/90th/index.asp>



*John Cernick, a long-time Hines volunteer was honored at the hospital's Anniversary ceremony*

## Da Vinci Robot Technology Comes to Hines

Hines surgeons are not only using their minds, skills, and talent in the operating room; they will soon be accompanied by four extra arms and 3D vision. Hines VA Hospital will soon be proud to offer Veteran patients the latest in operating room technology: the Da Vinci robot.

The Da Vinci robot uses the most advanced technology available to enable our surgeons to perform some of the most complex operations through a few tiny incisions, while increasing surgeons' vision, precision, dexterity and control.

The Da Vinci robot consists of a console where the surgeon sits while operating, an adjustable bed where the patient lays during surgery, four interactive robotic arms, and a high-definition 3D vision system.



“Hines is taking the care we provide our Veterans to the next level,” said Dr. Jeffrey Branch (above), Chief of Urology at Hines. “Patients will now benefit from less pain, less operative blood loss, and faster recovery times, but will continue to experience the same great level of care, expertise and dedication our surgeons have been providing at Hines VA Hospital.”

The Da Vinci adaptive, state-of-the-art technology allows the surgeon’s hand movements to be translated into precise movements spread to the four robotic arms working inside the patient’s body.

“We are thrilled to be able to offer our Veterans the latest surgical technology like the Da Vinci,” said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. “Our surgical staff at Hines is second-to-none. Providing them with four extra arms and 3D vision makes them unstoppable.” The new Da Vinci robot has arrived at the Hospital and will be up and running in early 2012.

## Iron Mountain

### Listening Session Held

The Oscar G. Johnson VAMC and the Sault Tribe Health Service hosted a Veteran Listening Session on October 11, 2011, at the Sault Tribe in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Medical Center Associate Director, Bill Caron, and the Directors of the Offices of Rural Health (ORH) and Tribal Government Relations (OTGR), Mary Beth Skupien and Stephanie Birdwell respectively, as well as other VA representatives were on hand to listen to Veterans' comments and concerns. Also discussed were possible improvement opportunities in providing services to the region.



*Listening to Veterans' concerns are (clockwise from bottom right): Joe Zimmerman (VISN 12 Strategic Planner), Bill Caron (Associate Director), James Shogren (Chippewa County VSO), Mary Beth Skupien (ORH), Rick Smith (Sault Tribe reporter), and Laura Thompson (Medical Case Manager, Sault Tribe Health Center)*



*Photo Caption 2: Bill Caron, Associate Director, OGJ VAMC and Denise Deitzen, Director, Saginaw VAMC, participating on a VA/IHS panel discussion at the VA/IHS Conference*

## Community Living Center Veterans at Bridge Dedication

The VAMC was well represented at the Veterans Day dedication of the new Veterans Memorial Bridge where a capacity crowd of over 500 observed the ceremony. Four Veterans from the Oscar G. Johnson Community Living Center and their volunteer escorts braved the cold, brisk day and attended the ceremony with the Medical Center Director, Mr. Jim Rice, in the dignitary tent behind the podium.



*People cheer as the VA Bus makes the first vehicle crossing over the new Veterans Memorial Bridge linking Michigan and Wisconsin*

The dedication ceremony included remarks by U.S. Representative Dan Benishek (D1-MI), Michigan Representative Ed McBroom, Wisconsin State Senator Jim Holperin, Wisconsin Representative Jeff Mursau, and the respective state secretaries for Veterans Affairs and Transportation. After the ceremony, the Oscar G. Johnson VAMC Bus carrying OGJ CLC Veterans and volunteers was the first vehicle driven over the bridge to the cheers of the crowd.

The new bridge spans the Menominee River linking the Upper Peninsula of Michigan with Northern Wisconsin and replaces a bridge built in 1928 of similar design to the bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis in 2007.

## Reaching Out to Student Veterans

As part of an effort to reach out to student Veterans, the Behavioral Health Department at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center has put together a multidisciplinary team to visit each college and university in the OGJ

VAMC catchment area. The team consists of the Social Work Executive, Gail Beauchamp, and OEF/OIF/OND Program Manager, Kathleen Truax. On some visits, they are accompanied by the Women Veterans Coordinator, Barbara Robinson.

The team typically coordinates their visit with another event the campus may be having. They present information to Veteran students and other interested students and faculty on VA benefits, programs, and employment as well as enrollment information. The feedback on this program has been very positive from both faculty and students. As a result of one of their visits, Gail and Kathy were invited back to Northern Michigan University to do a faculty presentation on PTSD and TBI due to their depth of knowledge.

Since June 2011, OGJ VAMC team has visited Bay College West, Nicolet College, Northern Michigan University, Finlandia University, Gogebic Community College, and Lake Superior State University. Most of the local colleges plan on including the outreach team for future events.



*Gail Beauchamp, left, and Kathleen Truax, right, talk to two student nurses at Lake Superior State University in Sault Sainte Marie about employment at the VA*

## Jesse Brown

### “Thinking Pink” Day

JBVAMC employees participated in National “Think Pink” Day on October 13 by wearing a pink ribbon or pink clothing in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the integral role of early detection in the prevention of breast cancer.



The pink ribbon is widely recognized as a symbol of breast cancer awareness and helps to promote the importance of a women’s decision to engage in the early detection of breast cancer, including mammography screenings, clinical breast examinations and self-examinations

### Veterans Day Ceremony

JBVAMC’s Veterans Day ceremony had a hint of Native American Heritage Month as US Navy submariner Benny McCabe provided the keynote remarks. McCabe, a member of the Navajo tribe, is the son of William McCabe, who organized and served as one of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers during World War II. The Code Talkers took part in every US Marine assault in the Pacific between 1942 and 1945.

The Navajo tribe has a strong military tradition. About 37 percent have served our Nation, compared to less than 2% of our country’s overall population. The McCabe family has followed that tradition, with several family members who have been on active duty in Iraq. Benny McCabe, a Veteran of the Korean War and Vietnam War eras, had many interesting military adventures, himself. He was declared dead and lost at sea when his submarine developed radar problems while sailing under the North Pole and was unable to communicate with the outside world.

Towards the end of the Veterans Day program, McCabe was one of six Korean War Veterans who were presented with a Department of Defense commemorative medal recognizing the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war. A packed crowd of over 300 people attended JBVAMC’s ceremony. Merri Dee, former Director of Community Relations for WGN-TV, served as Master of Ceremonies.



US Navy Veteran Benny McCabe, fourth from left, was presented with a foil engraved photo of the Korean War Memorial, as JBVAMC recognized Korean War Veterans as part of a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration by the Department of Defense. He is surrounded by (from left) Merri Dee, former Director of Community Relations for WGN-TV and current State President & Army Ambassador for the AARP, who served as Master of Ceremonies; Medical Center Director Michael A. Anaya, Sr.; Trent Ward, Assistant Chief, Voluntary Service; Lieutenant Robert Ruffolo, USA Director of Operations for the Department of Defense, who presented the Korean War 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative awards; and Navy Veteran Harry Sawyer, Manager of Field Services for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs

## Madison Operation Care and Share



The employees and volunteers of the Madison VAH recently combined their efforts to provide large food packages to needy Veterans and their families. The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Operation Care & Share donation drive was conducted in October.

Donations of non-perishable food items and cash donations are accepted during this drive. The monetary donations are utilized to purchase food items to support a traditional holiday turkey dinner, with all the trimmings along with basic items to provide each family with an abundance of additional meals. Each food package contains over 45 pounds of non-perishable food items with a 10-12 pound turkey. The Social Work Service staff has the key role of screening potential recipients for appropriateness. The food packages are available throughout the year to accommodate Veterans in need as they are encountered. Tremendous comments of appreciation are received from the recipients each year.

## Adopt-a-Family Program

The Nursing Recruitment and Retention Committee at the Madison VA Hospital sponsored their annual Adopt-a-Family program. This program is a way for the employees and volunteers at the Madison VAH to give back to their community by sponsoring a Veteran, community, or employee family for the holidays. The family remains anonymous to the adopting department.



Nursing Recruitment and Retention Committee Members share their favorite toys from gifts that were collected for the Adopt-a-Family program

Each family sponsored received a variety of gifts for both the adults and children as well as a gift card for a grocery store so they could purchase a holiday meal. Gifts were selected specifically for each family, based on a "wish list" that each family provided, and ranged in size and value from an adorable stuffed animal to household items to a Nintendo Wii gaming system. In addition to the many boxes of gifts that were collected, staff also donated wrapping paper, tape and batteries. The gifts were collected at the hospital and delivered to various locations for distribution. Participating in this program has been a wonderful way for staff and volunteers of the medical center to further support Veterans, employees, and surrounding community.

## Ramp to Relieve Hospital Parking

Veterans, staff and volunteers at William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison have been counting down the days—and even the hours—leading up to the opening of the facility's long-awaited parking structure.

The 826-space parking structure is expected to add about 600 parking spaces on the hospital grounds, allowing all patients, employees, volunteers and visitors to park on site. A shortage of parking spaces had forced many hospital staffers to park off site or use public transportation so that patients would not be inconvenienced.

Parking spots became even more scarce in May when the main patient parking lot was closed for the ramp's construction but patients continued parking on the grounds, using either a temporarily beefed-up free valet service or in a patient self-park area formerly used by staff.



*New parking ramp at the Madison VA hospital nears completion in this photo from late November*

## VA to Record Veterans Histories for Library of Congress



*The Veterans History Project's mission is to collect, preserve, and make available the personal accounts of U.S. military war Veterans*

Voluntary Services signed up to participate in the Library of Congress's Veterans History project.

The project will record the oral histories of U.S. war Veterans receiving care at the Madison VA Hospital. The Veterans who volunteer to be part of the project will be interviewed by hospital volunteers, who will be trained in

conducting interviews designed to capture interesting and important experiences that might otherwise be lost to history.

Histories will be recorded digitally and forwarded to the Library of Congress, where they will eventually be digitized and placed in a searchable online database. The project will also accept photographs, letters, official military documents, and diaries or journals.

All materials collected will become part of the library's permanent collection, available to researchers, scholars, students, writers and documentary filmmakers.

The U.S. Congress created the project in 2000 as part of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

## Milwaukee

### Fisher House in Wisconsin

The biker community didn't just rumble loudly when they came through the Zablocki grounds Sept. 10 – it was for a good cause as they raised thousands for the Fisher House Wisconsin.

More than 175 motorcycles and 229 riders participated in this event, raising more than \$15,000, with all funds going toward the construction of the local Fisher House.



*Frank Walker, who works in biomedical engineering, and his wife, Diane, are all smiles as they get ready to take off on the bike rally that raised \$15,000 for the Fisher House*

Fisher House provides a home away from home for military and Veterans family members to be close to a loved one when that person is hospitalized. The Wisconsin Fisher House will be the 57th one built throughout the United States. The Fisher House foundation recently opened the 55th one in Washington, DC, and the 56th one in Augusta, GA.

The motorcycle event was sponsored by the Combat Veterans Association and the House of Harley-Davidson. Riders registered at the Lake Wheeler Pavilion, toured scenic southeastern Wisconsin on their guided tour and finished with a lunch and after party at the House of Harley-Davidson. The honorary ride Chairperson was Past Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Thomas Tradewell. Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel was also on one of the lead vehicles for the ride.

The project is on target to begin construction in early 2013. Buttery said \$2.3 million of the \$6 million needed to build Fisher House in Wisconsin remains to be raised.



Medal of Honor recipient Gary Wetzel chats with a friend during the stop at Zablocki

## Veterans Day Activities

MaryAnn D'Acquisto remembers what it's like to live in a third-world country under a dictator. Memories of her working for six weeks in a hospital in Kenya aren't far from her mind.

That's one of the reasons, she said, she got involved with organizing the annual Veterans Day parade in downtown Milwaukee.

"Back then Kenya was having a lot of riots because they wanted freedom. You could get arrested if you didn't have a picture of the president in your house or where you worked," she said. "Sometimes people don't appreciate the freedoms they have. When you can see how badly people want to live in a free society, it makes you appreciative for what you have. Since taking over the parade, and working here at the VA, I've heard so many stories, and met people who have experienced so much, who went through so much. How could we not do something like this to honor them?"

She talks about the one man on her parade committee who spent five years in a Vietnamese POW camp, and others who show her pictures of austere living conditions in war.

"You wonder how they were able to do that," she said. "If it wasn't for the military and the sacrifices they made, we wouldn't be able to live like this. They've given so much so we can be free."

D'Acquisto took over the parade in 2001 when she heard it would be canceled for lack of funds and support. With the parade taking place two months after 9/11, the streets were packed with more than 10,000 spectators showing their appreciation and patriotism.



Vets Day Parade 2011 – Milwaukee VA nurses from throughout the medical center make up a huge contingent during the parade that is organized annually by MaryAnn D'Acquisto

"We just don't get that many anymore," she said with a frown. "People forget, or they don't care. But we have a lot of people who do care about making this happen."

D'Acquisto said it couldn't be done without a lot of help from groups of volunteers from the VA. The VA nurses are also a big contingent at the event, with more than 50 turning out to show their colors, as they marched through the streets of downtown Milwaukee. They were one of about 150 military and Veteran units who participated in the annual event.

D'Acquisto does all of the work in her off-duty hours. "It's like anything else in your life," she said. "If it's important, and it's a priority, you just make time for it." Besides the parade, other activities were planned.



Lucas Berndsen, 4, and Denise Jashinsky, chief of Voluntary Services, leads a capacity crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance at the Nov. 11 Veterans Day ceremony in the chapel. Lucas is the grandson of Mary Jo Jankovic, who also works in Voluntary Services



*Evelyn Woolpert serves as Mistress of Ceremonies for the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Band concert for VA patients on Veterans Day 2011. The band uses its extensive collection of restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century brass instruments and original music books to portray the Civil War military band from Brodhead, WI., a favorite of Gen. William Sherman. The event was sponsored by Friends of Reclaiming Our Heritage and the West Side Soldiers Aid Society*



*Wisconsin Lutheran High School students (from left to right) Josiah Ricke, Jonathan Melms and Michael Tomassetti, show off a huge banner they had signed by fellow students, teachers and family members, in honor of Veterans. They dropped off the banner on Veterans Day. It now hangs in the main reception area of the Independence Hall Community Living Center*

## Veteran Volunteers Needed

The Milwaukee VA is seeking Veteran volunteers to participate in an ambitious, one-of-a-kind, genomic program that will allow research into numerous illnesses and lead to advances in healthcare.

The VA's Million Veteran Program plans to enroll one million volunteers from across the nation for the largest genome study of its kind. Milwaukee is one of 31 VA Medical Centers now enrolling Veterans. The hospital hopes to enroll 25,000 Veterans to participate.

Officials said the program will identify gene-health connections, and could advance disease screening, diagnosis and prognosis and point the way toward more effective, personalized therapies.

Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health said the program, run by the Veterans Affairs Research and Development Program, will help researchers "learn more about how genes affect health, and thus, transform health care for Veterans and for all Americans."

Dr. Jeff Whittle, director of health services research from the Milwaukee VA, will conduct the portion of the study at the Milwaukee VA.

"Basically, it's going to teach us how to give personalized medicine to Vets," he said. "It will help identify genes that influence how the body reacts to drugs. It will identify genes that tell us why some people have diseases and others do not.

"As an example, we know lung cancer and cigarette smoking is linked, but a vast majority of people who do smoke, don't get lung cancer. This might help us find out why. We know very little about pancreatic cancer. If we can figure out the genes and the prediction rules, we can advise on lifestyle changes. It may help lead to changes in treatment for cancer and numerous other diseases, and help us focus our efforts on our patients," he added.

Those who wish to participate will be asked for a blood sample and to fill out a health survey. Participation also includes allowing approved researchers secure access to medical records and agreeing to future contact by the MVP staff.

The Million Veteran Program will consolidate genetic, military exposure, health, and lifestyle information together in one single database. The secure database will be used only by authorized researchers in the VA, other federal health agencies, and academic institutions within the United States.

Patient safety and information security are the top priorities in the program. To protect confidentiality, blood samples containing genetic material and health information collected for MVP will be stored in a secure manner and labeled with a barcode instead of personal information. The researchers who are approved to access samples and data will not receive the name, address, social security number or date of birth of participating Veterans.

The program has been developed in close coordination with the VA Genomic Medicine Program Advisory Committee — comprised of private and public health, scientific, and legal experts in the field of genetics, as well as Veteran representatives.

The aim of the program is to not come up with immediate answers, but to stockpile information that could answer a number of research questions and lead to new treatments down the road, Whittle said. Currently, volunteers can call and schedule an appointment, but Whittle hopes to soon have the program set up to allow walk-in volunteers to participate.

Those wishing to participate locally should call 1-866-441-6075 or visit the web site at [www.research.va.gov/MVP](http://www.research.va.gov/MVP) for more information.

## Benevolent Touch

Benevolent Touch is a new program designed to bring the best care to our Veterans. Benevolent Touch is any positive tactile contact on another or one's own skin with loving intent. It was developed originally at St. Ann Center in Milwaukee to help patients with Alzheimer's who may be challenged with anxiety and troubling behaviors such as wandering and aggression.

The theory behind Benevolent Touch is even though the mind deteriorates, the body often remembers. Initial training for RECC staff began in June 2010 and four staff members were certified by the St. Ann Center earlier this year.

Instructors are Maxine McCain, and Brigid Riordan, both registered nurses; and Mattie Murry and Glenda Riggs, both restorative nursing assistants. They have developed and started an education program to get as many staff across the RECC Division trained to be able to utilize Benevolent Touch in their daily work with the Veterans.

"I wanted to do this because I really believe in the concepts. I see how a massage can help people feel, and help them with pain and anxiety," Riggs said. "For a lot of people here, they don't have family or loved ones anymore, and no one touches them in a loving way. They're touched all day long medically – we poke, prod and take blood, but what they need is that hug or friendly squeeze."

According to the program, some unstructured forms of Benevolent Touch are hand holding, a pat on the back, hugging, and sitting in someone's presence. The structure types of Benevolent Touch that are included in the educational sessions are hand and foot massages, back massage, facial massage, shoulder massage and breathing and relaxation techniques.



*Maxine McCain, a registered nurse, demonstrates a massage as part of the Benevolent Touch program with Veteran Thomas Malone*

"Personal space is very important, and you don't do anything inappropriate or anything that might appear that way," Riggs said. "You definitely let the Veteran know what you are doing, and you get permission. The thing is, for many of us who work here, we really get to know the Veterans, and it is personal."

Staff members are encouraged to incorporate Benevolent Touch into their daily assignments, such as giving a head massage during a bath and shampoo, sitting with a Veteran and holding his or her hand, and providing

relaxation through light touch to help an anxious or restless Veteran calm down. The overall benefits to our Veterans include decreased anxiety, decreased pain, increased trust and relationship building, relaxation, better sleep, decreased agitation and restlessness, and enhanced energy and alertness.

The benefits for staff include improved therapeutic relationship building with the Veteran and augmenting the care they already provide with strategies to enhance the Veteran's comfort.

Riggs said she still tears up when she thinks about one Veteran who had dementia and was being transferred to another community nursing home.

"I usually go with all the guys who get placed in the community, so they don't go alone," she said. "I want them to go with a familiar face. This guy was scared, and his eyes were really big. You could see he was worried. I reached over and held his hand the whole way there."

"He told me, 'You don't know how good it is to just have someone hold my hand. It's been a long time.' He died a week later, and I think I may have been the last person to give him that kind of comfort."



*For many Veterans, the warmth of a gentle touch can be the best form of medicine. It is especially useful for elderly patients*

## Civilian Appreciation Day

Perhaps Veteran Joe Weber said it best when he looked out on a crowd of civilians and said what many in his shoes were thinking: "It is not often expressed, but your services and contributions help us each day conquer our mountain. Thank you so much."

Weber was on hand at the Matousek Auditorium Nov. 14 as part of the first-ever Civilian Appreciation Day at the Milwaukee VA.

The idea for a civilian recognition day is the brainchild of the Mental Health Consumer Council, made up of Veterans who use our VA for healthcare. They had an idea to publicly recognize civilians who made a positive difference in their lives – not just those in the VA, but in the community. Eileen Wilson, who works in Mental Health and helped organize the event, said it was intended to be a wonderful gesture to follow Veterans Day. "This was a chance for Veterans to show their appreciation to civilians who made an impact in their lives, because we don't always stop to think about them and thank them," she said.

But Wilson was surprised to find she was one of the recipients when World War II Veteran David Brandt, whom she escorted to Washington, D.C., for an Honor Flight, put her in for recognition.



*"Eileen Wilson gets a hug from World War II Veteran David Brandt after he recognized her for being his escort during his Honor Flight to Washington, DC*

"I did all that for him, but to see him there, and to get that, it made me cry," she said

All told, Veterans recognized 51 civilian employees in the VA for specific events.

Patti Schmidt, who works in Human Resources, reached out to fellow staff members for their support during two of her overseas deployments with the Army Reserves, while a community minister was thanked for setting up Milwaukee's first Veteran food bank. World War II Veteran David Brandt thanked Wilson for sponsoring him during his Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.

"This is the first year we've done this event and it was very well received," said Dr. Mike McBride, a psychologist in Mental Health. "We're hoping that next year it will be even better. It is with the continued help and support from our outstanding civilians that keep our Veterans, and our country, as great as they are.

## Lovell FHCC

### Nothing Can Stop These Donors From Giving

Not even rain, wind or a difficult-to-find location can stop them. After a terrible storm wreaked havoc on the first blood drive scheduled for staff members at the Lovell Federal Health Care Center, emails and phone calls from donors eager for a second chance to donate had been arriving in the recruiter's office for weeks.

So in the fall, the Blood Donor Processing Division, Great Lakes, IL, decided to return for a second staff blood drive. Except this time it wasn't the weather that posed challenges — it was a maze of drywall, framing and boarded up doorways.

Remodeling at the FHCC is in full swing, so locating the blood drive location was easier said than done. Donors had to navigate through considerable construction, a slew of directional signs and bypass an entire closed floor to find the space. Moving from building to building was, no doubt, a bit of a challenge, but for these great donors, it was nothing.

After navigating several turns and following the detailed directional instructions posted in hallways, everyone found the drive site location. Several gallon blood donors donated a unit, and many donors made a return visit from the last drive. With so many blood donors arriving, the Blood Donor Processing Division staff was happy to set up additional collection chairs. By the end of the drive, a total of 55 blood donors found their way through the maze of construction to donate — twice as many as the first Federal Health Care Center drive.



*Regular donor Charline Ivanovic gets blood drawn at the fall staff blood drive at Lovell Federal Health Care Center. Ivanovic is a gallon blood donor*

The dedication of determined donors made this drive a true success and is truly a sign of great things the FHCC staff members are doing. To learn more about the Armed Services Blood Program or to schedule an appointment for one of the upcoming blood drives, please visit us online: [www.militaryblood.dod.mil/greatlakes](http://www.militaryblood.dod.mil/greatlakes).

*Lovell Federal Health Care Center staff members wait for their chance to donate blood at a recent Armed Services Blood Program blood drive. Among them are Hall of Fame gallon donors Elyce J. Meistrup (far right) and Pamela A. Miller (second from right)*



## Adenovirus Vaccine is Back

On cue, 88 U. S. Navy recruits lifted small cups of water and swallowed the two pills that marked the culmination of a more than a decade of work to bring back the adenovirus vaccine.

There wasn't much fanfare at USS Red Rover – part of the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center – that October day in North Chicago, IL. The daily, very early morning business of conducting medical and dental checks on brand new Sailors was continuing as usual. But on the sidelines, FHCC staff members knew it was a historic moment.



*For the first time in more than a decade, recruits at USS Red Rover take the adenovirus vaccine during their medical in-processing at the Lovell Federal Health Care Center Clinic*

"This is a big deal for us," said Cmdr. Mark Herwitz, who heads USS Red Rover. "This vaccine has the potential to reduce the incidence of a virus that can significantly impact the training mission of recruits at the RTC (Recruit Training Command)."

In the general population, adenovirus – which can cause upper respiratory illnesses – isn't a public health problem. Symptoms include fever, sore throat, cough, congestion, headaches and eye infections. Occasionally the infected person gets pneumonia and, in rare cases, some die.

In a close-quarters environment, like the one recruit live and train in, illness spreads quickly and results in down time and missed training. If they are out sick too long, recruits may be "recycled" into new divisions, separated from their original group of fellow recruits.

The new vaccine will prevent that. Mark Lesko, head of Occupational Health Medicine Department at Lovell FHCC, said in clinical trials, the vaccine was more than 90 percent effective.

Herwitz said, "From a public health perspective, it's essential, to guard health and prevent sickness. Our biggest bang for the buck here is preventative medicine."

The Department of Defense invested approximately \$100 million over a 10-year period to bring the vaccine back to military recruits and basic trainees, Lesko said. Recruits received the vaccine for roughly 25 years, ending in the late 1990s when Wyeth Pharmaceuticals ceased production of the pills.

"The prior adenovirus vaccine was only indicated for the military population, and it was no longer a profitable endeavor for Wyeth to remain in production, nor for

other manufacturers to immediately take on new production in 1999," Lesko wrote in a fact sheet on the vaccine. After that, getting it going again was no easy feat. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration had decisions to make, a new manufacturer had to be found, and there were new clinical studies, including a large trial at USS Red Rover where thousands of volunteers agreed to try the vaccine.



*At USS Red Rover, Hospital Corpsman Jason Clark and Medicine Custodian Sarah McGraw prepare the adenovirus vaccine for the first group of recruits to receive it in more than a decade*

Brandon Burton, now Research Compliance Officer at Lovell FHCC, remembers those days well. He was the lead coordinator for the study. "I had 13 research coordinators and 110 part-time people working on that trial, and it took all of our energy for a couple of years," Burton said. "It's very satisfying to get to this point," Burton said.

Researchers weren't the only ones who prepared long in advance for the day the new vaccine would be administered for the first time. A six-member "Adenovirus Team" at USS Red Rover spent many hours training.

"The staff has done a fabulous job in prepping for the administration of this," said Lt. Cmdr. Tina Cox, staff nurse at USS Red Rover. Cox said team members, lead by Medicine Custodian Sarah McGraw, started months in advance with online training. They also role-played "on the green mat," where recruits line up before receiving vaccinations.

Hospitalman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Cody Davis, in particular, had to write and rehearse his "Green Mat Speech," the briefing he would give recruits outlining what the vaccine is and why it's beneficial. About an hour before the recruits lined up on the mat, Davis shrugged and smiled when asked if he was ready.

"The team probably spent more than 50 hours total to prepare," Cox said. "It's been a lot of hard work."

For Burton and Holly Gallo, one of the research coordinators for the trial, walking around USS Red Rover and being there to see the first recruits get the new vaccine was a homecoming of sorts, as well as a celebration.

"This is great," Gallo said, snapping photos of USS Red Rover staff preparing to administer the vaccine. "It's wonderful to be here and see this finally through to fruition."



*Hospital Corpsman Jason Clark readies the adenovirus vaccine at USS Red Rover. Clark was one of a six-member team to prepare months in advance to administer the vaccine at the Lovell Federal Health Care Center Clinic*

## Never Too Old To Learn New Technology!

Army Veteran Stan Goodwin “got out” in 1946 after serving six years many places, including with the Corps of Engineers in the Pacific. In 1979, the Arlington Heights resident retired from his civilian career as a structural engineer. In 2011, Goodwin continues to shoot pool, play golf, dabble in woodworking, play bridge and cribbage, go out for dinner with his two Centenarian buddies – and he checks his email daily.

The computer is no stranger to Goodwin, who celebrated his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday in October. Goodwin was more than agreeable when, on his visit to the Lovell FHCC for an annual checkup, he was asked by a volunteer to sign up for Myhealthvet online ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)).

Now Goodwin, who has been an FHCC patient since 2000, can communicate with his doctor via email, just like he does with his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. He orders mail-order prescription refills through Myhealthvet. And he is committed to learning how to get lab results through Myhealthvet, too.



*Army Veteran Stan Goodwin, 97, on the left, looks on while Myhealthvet volunteer and Veteran Ralph Stott shows him new features on the Myhealthvet Website [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)*

It’s a new way to communicate with my primary care doctor. It’s working out well,” he said, on his fall visit to the FHCC. Sitting at the Myhealthvet kiosk in Primary Care, Goodwin logged in securely and checked out new features on Myhealthvet with the help of volunteer Ralph Stott. Stott, a Vietnam-era Army Veteran, was the one who signed up Goodwin earlier this year.

“He wanted to put the power of prevention in his own hands,” Stott said. “Now he can send encrypted email to his doctors and get his medications.”

Doctors have three days to respond to patient emails sent through Myhealthvet, Stott pointed out.

Stott and other Myhealthvet volunteers literally roam the hallways of the FHCC encouraging patients to sign up and save themselves some of the visits they now make to the FHCC to get prescriptions, as well as the time they take communicating with their doctors and medical providers via the phone or by coming in for appointments.

“You could be at home, in Florida on vacation, it’s up to you. It’s just one more option,” said Sandy Cech, RN and Myhealthvet coordinator at Lovell FHCC.

Stott, himself, logs on to Myhealthvet to track his workouts and monitor his diet. “I’ve learned more about myself in four months than in 40 years of my life,” Stott said. “I’ve changed my diet and eat more veggies and fruit. I’m running two miles a day, riding my bike. I want to be in Mr. Goodwin’s position when I’m 97.”

Veterans, active duty service members and their dependents, and caregivers can use Myhealthvet for a variety of things. They can set up Myhealthvet so that they receive wellness reminders, and they can track medical appointments online. They can record their medical histories, track vital signs, and get lab results, all online from wherever they have Internet access. It’s accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and age doesn’t matter.

“A lot of times, there’s a prejudice out there” Cech said. “People don’t think an older adult would be on the computer. It’s a stigma I want to work on. That’s why I tell our volunteers to approach young and old.”

Volunteers at the FHCC walk patients through every step on Myhealthvet, including the In-Person Authentication process. After that, patients can use the Secure Messaging feature to communicate privately with their medical providers.

“It can make your life a little easier, and more things are added to the site all the time,” Cech said.



*Lovell FHCC patient Stan Goodwin, and Army Veteran, logs on to Myhealthvet ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)) on a recent visit to the Federal Health Care Center*

## Tomah

### Carnation Appreciation Day

The Carnation Appreciation Sale is Voluntary Service's biggest and best fund-raiser, generating close to \$2,000 in profit.

Funds are used for volunteer recognition events (i.e., White Elephant Bingo Party) and other purposes deemed appropriate by the VAVS Executive Committee (i.e., the tile for the Tomah Area Veterans Memorial).



*Volunteers gather around the nearly 3,629 flowers that needed to be delivered in one day*

### Veterans Help in Food Pantry Garden

"Giving Back to Your Community" - The Tomah food pantry was seeking volunteers to work in their garden via the Tomah Journal, when it was spotted by VA employee, Dawn Spence. This is the second year the food pantry has had a garden on their premises. Brainstorming and creativity ensued, with the thought that Veterans who receive mental health service, via Occupational Therapy (OT) and Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) would benefit from connecting with their community. Beyond the giving back to the community, Veterans gain self-esteem, benefit from structuring of time with meaningful activity, and from staying active while having fun.



*Left to right) Dawn Spence, Certified OT Assistant, Greg Arthur, Alfred Riley and Jen Lisy*

Each Thursday morning from 9-10 a.m. from May through September the group could be seen weeding or harvesting produce. The group harvested 666 pounds of various vegetables, including: green beans, radishes, tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers, zucchini, cantaloupe and occasional bouquets of flowers. The vegetables were donated to over 450 needy families and individuals from the Tomah area. The garden group hopes to expand both in numbers of Veterans and in frequency of participation in the following years.

### Partnering to Provide Mammograms to Rural Women Veterans

The VA Medical Center and the Marshfield Clinic have reached an agreement that makes it easier for women Veterans in central and north central Wisconsin to be screened for breast cancer.

This agreement opens the door for women Veterans living in Marathon, Price, Taylor, Portage, Wood and Clark Counties by offering local access to this very important well-woman exam.

Now Veterans can choose to have a mammogram at one of Marshfield Clinic's seven (7) Mammography Centers or on the Mobile Mammography Health Screening Unit that travels to 21 different communities throughout the region every month.

"We are very excited to partner with a world-class health-care organization like the Marshfield Clinic," said Acting Medical Center Director, Dr. David Houlihan. "Our mandate was to provide these services for women Veterans and not to exceed a driving distance of 50 miles. This agreement is a milestone in our efforts to provide the best care anywhere to eligible women Veterans in a service area that is predominantly rural."

After a VA Medical Provider orders a mammogram, the Veteran will get instructions on 'how to' make an appointment at the Marshfield Clinic location of her choice on a day and time that fits her busy schedule.

"This is great news for women Veterans who live in remote rural areas," said Tomah VA Women Veterans Program Manager, Clelia Taylor. "Often women delay having a mammogram because work or family responsibilities make it difficult for them to get away. Before this agreement with Marshfield Clinic, women Veterans who receive primary care at our Outpatient Clinics in Wausau, Wisconsin Rapids and Clark County have had to drive to and from Tomah or La Crosse just for a mammogram. This is much more convenient."

## New Patriot Mobile Medical System

The Tomah VA Medical Center debuted a new mobile treatment unit that can become a fully functioning 45-bed hospital in less than six hours.

The Patriot Mobile Medical System is a state-of-the-art rapidly deployed 45 bed field hospital. This is a modular system that can be sized to meet any needs and is deployable in minimal time.

The system includes a multi-functional “two story” trailer with dual slide-out command center, two satellite receivers, two generator sets, two light towers, bath with shower, kitchen with laundry, staff support facilities, heating and cooling units, 3-phase Electrical System, Shelters and 45 beds.



Everything needed to set up the system is transported in a 53-foot trailer and a 36-foot trailer. Tomah VA Emergency Management Specialist Stephen Amling said the system, which cost a little more than \$1 million, was purchased to meet the VA's increased emergency management mission.



Although intended for local use, it may also be deployed at disasters in other parts of the country

## Awards & Recognition

### Hines 2011 James Brady Award



*The award-winning Hines Polytrauma Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Team*

The Hines Brain Rehabilitation Team is the recipient of the prestigious 2011 James Brady Award from Illinois Brain Injury Association. This distinguished award is given to honor a person or organization that goes above and beyond to improve lives of persons with brain injury, thereby supporting the mission and goals of the Brain Injury Association of Illinois. The Award was presented to the Hines VA Brain Injury Rehabilitation team at an awards dinner in late October

“VA is a leader in research and treatment of Traumatic Brain Injuries,” said Monica Steiner, MD, Chief of Rehabilitation at Hines. “The staff on our Brain Injury Rehabilitation team provides a comprehensive rehabilitation program addressing the Veteran’s physical and cognitive needs, as well as providing services to Veterans families.” “We are proud to provide top quality healthcare to our nation’s heroes who have traumatic brain injuries.”

An increasing number of Veterans are returning home from service with brain injuries; diagnosed and undiagnosed.

Hines VA Rehabilitation staff are leaders in providing education and resources to Veterans and their families. Hines is also a leader in Research and testing to address current and future brain injury treatment, rehabilitation and injury prevention.

“Hines offers Veterans with traumatic brain injuries top quality care,” said Sharon Helman, Hospital Director. “This award is great recognition of the achievements of our staff and the quality of care we provide.

Each year 1.4 million people in the United States sustain a traumatic brain injury and 50,000 of them die as a result. The leading causes of traumatic brain injury are falls and traffic accidents which are most likely to impact children four and under and young people 15 to 19 years old. It is estimated that more than 50% of injured Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have some degree of brain injury.

## Iron Mountain VA- Physician Returns From Fifth Deployment



James W. Rice (r), VA Medical Center Director, presents Dr. Edward A. (Alex) Perez-Conde, M.D., with a VA Recognition Award for dedicated service to his country as both a military and Veterans Affairs physician. Dr. Perez is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserve and just returned from his fifth deployment, most recently to Germany. His previous four deployments were to Kosovo, Germany, Iraq and Afghanistan. Dr. Perez has been employed at the VA since 1999 and works in the Emergency Department at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center

## Madison VA – Two Employees Are Recognized As Award Winners



**Renae Alswager-Klein**, Madison VA Interior Designer, was recently recognized by the VA Central Office Environmental Program Service and all EMS Service Chiefs and awarded the 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award. "As a leader she formulated an Interior Design program that has transcended a 62-year-old TB Hospital to a beautiful and inspiring center of health and healing."

**Christine Sorkness** has been named as the winner of the American Society of Health-Systems Pharmacists 2011 Award for Sustained Contributions to the literature. The Award for Sustained Contributions is made to an individual who has a track record for publishing relevant articles of consistently high quality and impact in the primary, peer-reviewed, biomedical literature over a minimum of ten years. This is a major recognition for an extremely well deserving individual. Her sustained contributions can also be said of her impact to our VA (developing outpatient anticoagulation clinic, training countless residents and providers, improving patient care, and research over the past 30+ years).

## Construction Team Champions

The Great Lakes Acquisition Center Construction Team lead the way in VA's Awarding of \$1,993,280,098.00 worth of NRM construction contracts into the U.S. Economy by way of contracting primarily with Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business firms, to rebuild and repair VA's Physical Plant infrastructure. In so doing, VISN 12 completed another year of carrying for those that have borne our nations battles from Normandy, to Iwo Jima, from Korea to VietNam, from Iraq to Afghanistan.



Robert Beller, Director at Milwaukee (l) presents a Service Award to Ricky Bond and the Great Lakes Acquisition Center Construction Team

## New VA Clinics in the Network

More than 300 Veterans kicked off Veterans Day weekend by attending a special Ribbon Cutting ceremony marking the opening of **Hines VA Hospital's** new Clinic location in Kankakee County. The new clinic location, which is in Bourbonnais, IL, offers area Veterans a beautiful, gorgeous new clinic in which to receive their top quality health care.

"It may not be a sunny day today, but for the Veterans here in Kankakee, everything is a lot brighter now that we have our beautiful new Clinic," said John Fulton, President of the Kankakee County Veterans Commission, who spoke at the Ribbon Cutting. "This new clinic is so much bigger, and has so much more to offer us. I can't express enough how grateful we are."

The Ribbon Cutting took place on the Thursday before Veterans Day, which coincidentally was also the Marine Corps Birthday. The Kankakee County Marine Corps League performed a special flag raising ceremony during the ribbon cutting. Kankakee area school children decorated the ribbon cutting event with hundreds of Veterans Day cards and drawings, thanking Veterans for their service. Congressman Adam Kinzinger was also present to offer his support of the new clinic.



*Congressman Adam Kinzinger, Sharon Helman Hines Director, Lynette McLaughlin, Nurse Manager at the Kankakee CBOC and John Fulton, President of the Kankakee County Veterans Council, cut the ribbon on the new clinic in Kankakee*



*Jim Ryan from the Kankakee County Veterans Committee, participated in a special flag raising ceremony at the Kankakee CBOC ribbon-cutting*

“This place is great,” said Congressman Kinzinger. “Judging by the turnout today, I think we can say that as Veterans, we are all thrilled about the new clinic.”

Sharon Helman, Hines Director, spoke at the ribbon cutting. “This is your clinic,” she told area Veterans, who were packed into a huge standing-room-only space.



*Hundreds of enthusiastic Veterans from Kankakee and Iroquois Counties, attended the ribbon cutting on the new Hines Kankakee CBOC*

“You served our country and we are proud and honored to be able to serve you now in this modern, professional space that you deserve.”

The new Kankakee Clinic offers area Veterans many additional services, including physical therapy, lab services, telehealth services and much more.

“We hope our new Clinic location attracts many new Veterans and encourages them to take advantage of the healthcare they have earned and deserve,” said Director Helman.



*JBVAMC Medical Center Director Michael A. Anaya, Sr., prepares to cut the ribbon to officially dedicate the new Adam Benjamin, Jr. VA Outpatient Clinic in Crown Point, IN. He is surrounded by family members of the late Congressman Adam Benjamin, Jr., as well as Joseph Zimmerman, VISN 12 Strategic Planner, (left); Ronald Hughes, Chief of Engineering for JBVAMC (third from left); Dr. Michael Bonner, Chief Medical Officer (fourth from left); CBOC Director Jill Carley (seventh from left); and Master of Ceremonies Harry Porterfield (far right)*

The Adam Benjamin, Jr. VA Outpatient Clinic – one of **Jesse Brown VAMC**’s four community based outpatient clinics – held a dedication ceremony on November 4 to celebrate the opening of its new 70,000 square foot replacement facility, located adjacent to the original Crown Point, Indiana, clinic that opened in 1988.

The ceremony was well attended by family members of the late Congressman Adam Benjamin, Jr., who had spearheaded efforts to open the original clinic, JBVAMC and VISN 12 leadership, the Mayor of Crown Point and State Commanders from Veterans Service Organizations throughout the Chicago area and northwest Indiana. Harry Porterfield from CBS News in Chicago served as Master of Ceremonies.

Jill Carley, CBOC Director, said the new facility was necessary to serve the continually expanding number of Veterans enrolling for services at the Crown Point Clinic. Over 13,000 Veterans receive their health care there.



"We are thrilled to offer excellent care to our nation's heroes in a new state-of-the-art facility," said Carley. "We have outgrown our former clinic and continue to attract new Veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Our new clinic is about 75 percent larger than our previous building and assures we will meet the future needs of Veterans residing in northwest Indiana."

JBVAMC's Medical Center Director Michael A. Anaya, Sr., lauded the clinic and its employees for the high quality of care provided and for reaching out to Veterans within its community. "This clinic has increased the number of Veterans it serves by 65 percent over the past 10 years," said Anaya. "That is phenomenal growth."

The Crown Point Clinic provides more comprehensive services than typically seen at VA freestanding clinics. Its new facility provides additional space for expanding primary care in the new Patient Aligned Care Team model, telehealth services, mental health, physical rehabilitation, dental, pharmacy, radiology, laboratory, optometry, patient education, audiology and specialty services including podiatry. It also provides space for a new Women's Health Care suite with five dedicated examination rooms and a segregated waiting area.

One shovel full of dirt for man ... one giant construction project for mankind ...

Perhaps that might be a bit lofty of a description for the dirt field in the 2800 block of University Avenue in Green Bay that will one day be the Milo C. Huempfer mega-Community Based Outpatient Clinic, but it will be rather significant for the 20,000 Veterans who live in and around the area.

After years of planning and some unforeseen delays, the Department of Veterans Affairs took the next critical step forward in building the clinic with the Oct. 20 official groundbreaking. The goal was to break ground as soon as possible so work can continue throughout the winter, and the clinic will open in 2013. "We are ecstatic to move forward with this construction, so we can continue to deliver the world-class care that Veterans have earned and deserve," said Robert Beller, the **Milwaukee VA** Medical Center director, which will provide oversight for the clinic, once it is complete.



*VA and elected officials, as well as Summit Smith, joined forces with Jacki Schneider and Wayne Huempfer (far right), family members of Milo C. Huempfer, to take the first ceremonial pitch of dirt to mark the Green Bay Clinic groundbreaking*

Once complete, the two-story Green Bay Clinic will have 161,525 square feet and 1,200 parking spaces. It will include ambulatory surgery, a specialty clinic, women's clinic, mental health department and diagnostic imaging.



*Artist's rendition of the future Milo C. Huempfer Green Bay Clinic, scheduled to open in 2013*

It will offer everything short of overnight stays. If you ask the Veterans they'll tell you it's something they've wanted and is long overdue. It's something we want to, and we're very excited," said Karen Karch, who is currently the clinic manager.

The current Green Bay Clinic is only about 7,000 square feet and serves 3,500 patients a year. The new clinic will be able to serve nearly 20,000 Veterans. "The current facility just isn't meeting all the demands, so this is going to be huge," Karch said. "Right now, many of the Veterans in the area have to travel to Milwaukee for their care, or see physicians in the local community. A lot of them don't want to travel. Plus, if we're taking care of them for all of their needs it allows for better continuity of care, so we can better help them with all of their healthcare needs."



On September 7, 2011, the **Tomah VAMC** opened the Clark County VA Outpatient Clinic, located in Owen, Wisconsin. The previous clinic, operated in Loyal, Wisconsin from July 1993 to August 30, 2011.

"We want to thank the Loyal community for partnering with us all of these years," said Tomah VA's Acting Medical Center Director Dr. David Houlihan. "The new location in Owen brings us a little closer to Veterans in our northern counties which are a population we want to serve."

According to the Veterans Health Administration's Office of Rural Health (VHAORH), there are just over 3.4 million rural Veterans enrolled in the VA system, which represents 41% of the total enrolled Veteran population. One of the priorities for the new clinic is to expand services for rural Veterans. At 3,000 square feet, the new clinic has more than three times the space with off street parking.

"Not only are we expanding our operation to four days a week, Monday through Thursday," said Dr. Houlihan, in addition to Primary Care, we are adding mental health, tele-health and women's health services.

## Stand Down/Homeless Events Held Around the Network

More than 700 Veterans attended the Chicago Winter 2011 Stand Down for Homeless Veterans in early November. The Stand Down was put on by the Oak Park Vet Center, **Hines VA Hospital** and **Jesse Brown VAMC**, in coordination with numerous other local, state and government agencies. It was held in a National Guard Armory in the city of Chicago.



*Hundreds of Veterans lined up to receive winter clothing at the Chicago Stand Down this year*

The Veterans signed up for VA and community assistance and services and received winter clothing, medical checkups and even haircuts, during the Stand Down.



*Free haircuts were a popular service at the Winter Stand Down this year*

"The Winter Stand Down is a great place for us to reach out to Veterans and make sure they are signed up and aware of all the services the VA can provide them," said Bill Baxter, Homeless Coordinator at the Hines VA Hospital. "This year's Stand Down was especially great because there were so many agencies and individuals there joining together to help our Veterans. It was a true team effort."

Chicago's One Team Chicago initiative, aimed at uniting all the relevant parties in Chicago to end Veteran homelessness, served as a natural planning meeting for the Stand Down, making the event even larger and more comprehensive than in years past. Cook County Board President, Toni Preckwinkle visited the Stand Down this year and was impressed with all the agencies and individuals there dedicated to ending homelessness among our Veterans.

"Taking a day to reach out to America's heroes who need our help, is very important," said Sharon Helman, Hines Director. "This year's Stand Down touched the lives of literally hundreds of Veterans and offered them assistance when they need it the most. I am proud of the staff at Hines and Jesse Brown for their dedication and commitment to these Veterans."

**Iron Mountain VAMC** hosted its Second Annual Summit to End Veteran Homelessness on November 3, 2011, bringing together community organizations and agencies to discuss how to best partner in addressing homelessness among Veterans within the community. "Veterans are a part of their communities, and that is where we can come together to end Veteran Homelessness," said Nicole Foster-Holdwick, Homeless Program Coordinator at the VA Medical Center, "the VA needs to work closely with local community organizations."

More than fifty people were in attendance at the Summit, which was held at the Lakeview Arena in Marquette, Michigan.

In the Upper Peninsula, homelessness may not be as visible as in metropolitan areas, but without a doubt still exist in this rural area. "Some homeless individuals stay with friends," (e.g., couch surfing), "or at one of the few Homeless Shelters in the Upper Peninsula, which are only designed to provide a temporary living accommodation," said Foster-Holdwick.

According to statistics from the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness, there were 84 homeless Veterans in the Upper Peninsula that sought services from community agencies in 2010, and an estimated total homeless population of 4,303 in the same region, a nearly 80% increase since 2007.



*Nicole Foster-Holdwick welcomes attendees and provides an introduction to the 2011 Homeless Summit. At the head table are presenters from the VA and other community organizations*

Providing presentations at the Homeless Summit were representatives from the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness, Northern Michigan University Social Work Department, Room at the Inn Rotating Homeless Shelter, Marquette/Alger County Housing Assessment and Resource Agency, VA Mobile VET Center, and the Medical Center's Vocational Rehabilitation and Veteran Justice Outreach programs.

# Homeless Summit

## A Fond Farewell



Ms. Deborah A. Thompson, Director at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital and Clinics in Madison, WI, has announced her retirement effective February 3, 2012. Ms. Thompson was appointed as Director of the Madison VA on June 10, 2007.

A native of Missouri, Ms. Thompson received her undergraduate and Master's degrees from the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. She began her career as a medical librarian working for several

universities, Air Force Bases and VA hospitals in Missouri, Indiana, Colorado, Hawaii and Mississippi. She earned a MBA in 1991 from the University of Phoenix.

She became Special Assistant to the Director of the Denver VAMC and was selected for the Associate Director Training Program in 1994. She trained at the Portland, OR VAMC and entered into her executive career as the Associate Director of the VA Black Hills Health Care System in 1995. She has since served as the Associate Director of the Madison VA Hospital and in VAMC Director positions at Iron Mountain, MI, Northern Arizona VA in Prescott, AZ and currently in Madison, WI.

She has served on many national VHA committees, including the National Leadership Board Strategic Planning Committee, Diversity Advisory Board, National Veteran Service & Advocacy Advisory Board and the Associated Health Strategic Planning Advisory Group. During her career she has been active in leadership development/mentoring and has taken leadership roles in designing local, regional and national Executive Leadership programs for VHA. During her tenure at the Madison VAH, Ms. Thompson was awarded the Presidential rank award of Meritorious Executive in the Senior Executive Service and the VA American College of Healthcare Executives Regents Award.

Career highlights include working tirelessly to improve the care and treatment of Veterans, motivating staff to always give their best and remember the importance of their mission, highlighting and promoting the role of women in leadership, establishing lasting relationships throughout the VHA and in the community, and continuously mentoring tomorrow's leaders.

Ms. Thompson will enjoy traveling with her husband Mike, and visiting her two children, one on each coast, while she plans the next phase of her life. She would like to thank each and every co-worker and employee she has met along the way, and leaves with the conviction that it has been an honor and a privilege to work for this country's most deserving heroes.

## In the Spotlight

### A New Year, A New You... with a Little Help from My HealtheVet

Eat Better!

Lose Weight!

Quit Smoking!

It's not uncommon to start the New Year with resolutions much like these. In fact, according to a 2009 poll 100 million Americans make New Year's resolutions each year.



*Working with a dietitian can help lead to good nutrition to match your specific needs*

Sticking to them, however, is a different story. At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), helping Veterans achieve their "new self" is aided by online tools as well as many health and wellness programs at the local VA Medical Centers.

My HealtheVet VA's online personal health record, has food and activity journals, mental health screening tools, a Health Information Library and the ability to track appointments and get prescription refills. These tools are designed to help Veterans take control of their health and their lives.

Another resource for Veterans is VA's MOVE! Weight Management Program, which has helped over 300,000 Veterans lose weight. According to Dr. Kenneth Jones, National Director of MOVE!, 77 percent of all Veterans are overweight or obese, and 9 percent of Veterans are currently enrolled in MOVE! In order to better address the unique weight loss needs to Veterans, new rules require that all Veterans receiving physicals will be automatically screened to see if they qualify for MOVE!

Take these first steps and make an appointment with your health care provider.



So what's the first step toward a "new you"?

*The My HealtheVet food and activity journals make it easy to keep track of progress.*

**MOVE!** Has two overarching recommendations for weight loss: First, Reduce the number of calories consumed, and second, make time for physical activity.

These recommendations are not unique to Veterans, but the tools accessible through MOVE! And My HealtheVet are available to improve the daily and long-term health of Veterans.

#### What's at risk if I don't change?

Your health is at risk if you remain overweight or obese. Your chances of heart disease, diabetes, gallstones, sleep apnea and cancers increase drastically.

#### What should I eat?

MOVE! Encourages Veterans to select a healthy diet plan and provides guidance on ways to modify eating habits to reduce excess calories. Many Veterans have medical conditions that require special diets and they should consult with a dietitian while participating in MOVE!

"Providing the exact same diet for all Veterans is not the best idea. A diet plan that works for one person might not work for another," said Lynn Novorska, MOVE! Dietitian Program Coordinator. The multidisciplinary MOVE! Team will guide you to design a diet and exercise program that best suits your unique preferences, lifestyle and energy needs.

#### How much should I exercise?

To help you lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, Jones recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise, five times per week. When beginning exercises, start with moderate intensity doing walking, swimming, biking, jogging, rowing, or dancing. Once you begin losing weight and are comfortable with physical activity, change your workout from moderate to vigorous intensity.

Please remember to stay within your limitations and do not perform anything strenuous.

2012 is your year to get healthy and happy. Take these first steps and get started.

## VA Introduces *Make the Connection*: Shared Experiences and Support for Veterans



*Make the Connection* is a new campaign launched by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is creating ways for Veterans and their family members to connect with the experiences of other Veterans—and ultimately to connect with information and resources to help them confront the challenges of transitioning from service, face health issues, or navigate the complexities of daily life as a civilian.

“I have seen over and over again how important it can be for a Veteran to hear a message from another Veteran. This type of communication will be especially useful in helping to break down the stigma associated with mental health issues and treatment,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA is leveraging this powerful connection using an approachable online resource that links Veterans to personal stories from their peers, to VA resources and support, and to reliable information about mental health and resilience.”

The campaign’s central focus is a website, [www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net), featuring numerous Veterans who have shared their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. It offers a place where Veterans and their families can view the candid, personal testimonials of other Veterans who have dealt with and are working through a variety of common life experiences, day-to-day symptoms, and mental health conditions. The Website also connects Veterans and their family members with services and resources that may help them live more fulfilling lives.

“VA is heartened by the tremendous commitment of Veterans of all service eras, genders and backgrounds who are stepping up to share their stories,” said Shinseki. “Just as they would never leave a fellow Service member behind on the field of battle, they are once again reaching out to support their fellow Veterans with their compelling examples of successful treatment and recovery.”

At [MakeTheConnection.net](http://MakeTheConnection.net), Veterans and their family members can explore information on mental health issues and treatment—and easily access support—in comfort and privacy, anywhere, anytime. Visitors to the Web site can customize and filter their online experience, directly connecting with content that is the most relevant to their own lives and situations.

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