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Veteran Loans Sculpture to VA Medical Center

Accepting the sculpture from Charles Hamilton (center) for temporary display is James W. Rice (right), Medical Center Director, and Bill Caron (left), Associate Medical Center Director.

Viet Nam Veteran Charles Hamilton of Irma, Wisconsin, delivered his 10-foot tall metal sculpture for temporary display at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center. The statue "Determination" is that of a wounded military person carrying a flag with helmets at the base. It had been displayed in the past with The Moving Wall, a traveling replica of the Viet Nam Memorial Wall in Spooner, WI. Mr. Hamilton purposely left the statue faceless, genderless and lacking service identity to represent all men and women who have served in the armed forces of the United States.

"The VA actually got me into making metal sculptures," said Hamilton. "I took a course in welding through the VA's rehabilitation program, and afterwards I began to play with some models, liked it and took off from there."

Hamilton's motivation for creating this unique sculpture was to help Veterans heal their spiritual wounds while offering the public a moving tribute to the sacrifice of servicemen and women and their families. Indeed, it has already impacted visitors. Soon after it was set into place in the main entrance, one young Veteran entering the Medical Center took a cell phone picture of the sculpture. Another, an elderly Veteran, walked up to it, looked closely, and then asked who made it. He was directed to Mr. Charles Hamilton, and the Veteran thanked him.

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Network News

Hines

SkyWatch™ Surveillance Tower Deployed

Continues Ongoing Efforts to improve safety and security for Veterans

Veterans, visitors and staff at Hines may be surprised by the new steps the hospital has recently taken to ensure their safety and security. Hines Police Service recently deployed a SkyWatch™ Police Surveillance Tower to ensure that Veterans, employees, government property, visitors, and contractors, as well as personal vehicles and property remain safe.

SkyWatch™ is a mobile surveillance tower that rises up over forty feet into the air so that Hines VA Police Officers stationed inside of the tower, or watching remote closed circuit television cameras mounted on the outside of the tower, can safely view the various parking lots located at Hines.

"Vantage point is everything when it comes to surveillance," said Don Gardiner, Hines Chief of Police. "The SkyWatch™ tower provides the Police a safe and level platform to monitor what is going on the Hines campus. Our jobs just got a lot easier."

The portable tower includes the basics for the comfort and safety of the officer inside through adjustable heat and air conditioning; tinted, ballistic-proof sliding glass windows; and comfortable seating. The unit is rated to withstand sustained winds of 70 mph. Only one person is required to set up and deploy the dual-axle, four-wheeled unit, but inside there is ample room for two officers.

"Hines has a 50-plus acre campus with over forty separate buildings, and over 20 individual parking lots," said Chief Gardiner. "The campus has over 3,400 individual parking spaces, and averages well over 4,000 patient, employee, vendor or contractor visits per day. Monitoring these parking lots 24/7 was a daunting task for the Police Force. This task just got a lot easier."

The SkyWatch™ can easily be relocated, and is rugged enough to handle even the most primitive off-road conditions. As a VISN 12 asset, the Hines VA Police will be able to transport the tower over the road at highway speeds to the other medical centers in the region, or to other government-sponsored events whenever there is a need for it. The tower has exterior lights, cameras, radios, a public address system as well as other equipment. Now, one Hines VA Police Officer can easily cover an area previously requiring three or more personnel.

"We are thrilled that the Hines VA Police Service was able to acquire a SkyWatch™", said Police Lieutenant Michael Guajardo, the officer in charge of the deployment and maintenance of the unit. Guajardo is also an Army combat Veteran and has used a SkyWatch™ tower to help guard his forward operating base while deployed to Iraq. "We owe it to our fellow Veterans, patients and their families to make sure that they, and their property, are safe while they visit Hines. They are our nation's heroes, and it is the least we can do. We enjoy helping them stay safe when they need it most." LT Guajardo said that the unit will be used year-round and is a great crime deterrent, even when officers are not located inside.

A New Clinic location in Oak Lawn Expands Services to Area Veterans

The Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital expanded services to Veterans in the southwest suburbs of Chicago in February by opening a new, larger and more modern outpatient clinic in Oak Lawn, Illinois. The new clinic, which is located just one mile from the former VA clinic location in Oak Lawn, features almost three times the clinical space of the old location as well as expanded parking. The new Clinic opened for Veterans on Tuesday, February 21, 2012.

"VA is committed to providing our Veterans with top quality healthcare as close to their homes as

possible," said Jack Bulmash, Hines Chief of Staff. "We are always looking for better ways to serve our Veterans. This new location in Oak Lawn allows us to expand our services to Veterans in areas like mental health and social work, women's health, nutrition, pharmacy, etc. We are thrilled to provide our top quality health care to Veterans in this area in a brand new state-of-the-art clinic location."

Hines VA Hospital has operated a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Oak Lawn for almost 10 years. The clinic has consistently grown and now sees more than 5400 patients per year. The old location reached its physical capacity for the current services provided for Veterans in this area. Additional space was necessary to support the ancillary and specialty services of this population of Veterans as well as to meet projected future VA enrollment.

The new clinic location will improve access and convenience for Veterans who would like to take advantage of VA services but may not want drive to the Hines VA Hospital, located 15 miles from the new location. The new clinic is located at 10201 S. Cicero Avenue in Oak Lawn. The phone number at the clinic is 708-499-3675. The ribbon cutting and open house is scheduled for April 6, 2012.

New Leadership-New Challenges

New leadership, new challenges and some beautiful new buildings are on the horizon in the near future at Hines. Former Hines Director Sharon Helman recently left Chicago to become the new Director of the Phoenix VAMC and Peter Dancy, Associate Director, transferred to the Dallas VAMC to become their Associate Director. The search for replacements for both of these important positions is ongoing and in the meantime, key members of the Hines leadership team have stepped up to help run the hospital and maintain top quality service to Veterans.

According to Dr. Jack Bulmash, who was named the hospital's permanent Chief of Staff a few short months ago, it is an exciting time to be at Hines. "Although we were very sad to say farewell to the Director and Associate Director, there are several noteworthy achievements that have recently been launched at Hines and even more coming in the next few months."

Veterans and staff lined up to wish Sharon Helman, departing Hines Director, good luck in Phoenix.

In the month of February, Hines surgeons completed the first cochlear implant surgery at the hospital. Also in February, the hospital employed the recently-acquired DaVinci Robot Technology for the first time. "We are proud to offer our Veterans these new services at Hines," Dr. Bulmash added. "The Hines of today is much different than Hines in years past. We have new technology, newly renovated areas throughout the hospital and lots of new, energetic and enthusiastic staff. In combination with all these new things, we still have many long-time dedicated employees."

This summer Hines staff is also looking forward to the completion of the major renovation project at the front of the hospital. The new entrance to the main hospital, Building 200, will feature an overhang for patient and visitor drop off, a gorgeous new modern lobby design and kiosks to better direct patients and visitors.

As the front lobby project progresses, employees and Veterans are enjoying watching the look of the entire front of the hospital change. "It's amazing how the new lobby design is already transforming the front of our campus," said Barb Hunt, Chief of Voluntary Service and a longtime Hines employee. "Every day I look forward to coming in and seeing all the changes going on in the front of the hospital."

The new lobby renovation is not the only project scheduled to be completed this summer. Buildings 12 and 13 have been under total renovation for the past year. The buildings, which will be separated by a beautiful glass Winter Garden, are scheduled to open in August. One of the buildings will house a new Veteran/Employee Fitness Center and the other will house a number of Mental Health programs that are currently scattered throughout the hospital.

"Both employees and Veterans are so looking forward to the opening of these two new buildings," said Dr. Bulmash. "It truly is an exciting time to be at Hines."

Black History Month Fun

Several hundred employees stopped by to view the display and learn about the impressive history of the Buffalo troopers.

The Buffalo Troopers visited Hines during Black History Month. They went to several inpatient areas to thank the Veterans for their service and set up a very popular informational display in the hospital's lobby.

During Black History Month Hines Veterans and employees had a great time creating their own Soul Train line in honor of Don Cornelius, creator of Soul Train, who recently passed away.

Jackie Wilkerson, (center) and others dressed in their Soul Train gear and got into the spirit.

Chinese New Year

The Hines Asian Pacific Islander Committee hosted a special Chinese New Year celebration for Veterans and staff. Children from the hospital's Childcare Center were thrilled to learn about the Chinese culture and take part in the celebration

Rochelle Kirwan, (on bike) Dietician, instructed employees on how to use the hospital's exercise

Although this winter has been relatively mild in Chicago, the Hines Employee Association put on a special Beat the Winter Blues celebration for employees in February. Employees like those pictured were educated on fitness, diet and other healthy tips to get through the winter months.

Fisher House Turns Two

The Hines Fisher House celebrated its second anniversary with a very special party in early March. Veterans, family members who have stayed at the Fisher House, and members of the Chicago community who regularly support the Fisher House gathered for lunch, music and fun.

Since the Hines Fisher House opened in March of 2010, more than 1600 Veterans and guests have stayed in the beautiful facility that looks as gorgeous today as it did the day the House opened.

Holly Wright, Hines Fisher Manager (center) had a great time at the House's second anniversary party. Betty Stamatis, President of Friends of Fisher House, Illinois and Chuck Dickinson, a former Hines employee and Veteran, also enjoyed the party.

"The Hines Fisher House really has been like a home for me and for my husband," said Carol Thomas, the wife of a Vietnam Veteran and frequent guest at the House. Mrs. Thomas was one of the first guests who stayed in the Hines Fisher House and had the privilege of meeting President Obama when he visited the House. "My husband has been in the hospital several times over the past few years and every time the Fisher House has been there for us. It allows me to be close to him when he needs me the most."

In addition to a number of current and former Hines Fisher House guests who attended the anniversary celebration, representatives from numerous community groups, including Kronos Food, the U.S. Secret Service, Carstar, and Friends of Fisher House, Illinois, were at the House to mark this special occasion.

"Looking back over the past two years, we are so thankful for the support of the Chicago community," said Holly Wright, Hines Fisher House Manager. "Whenever one of our families or our House is in need of some special assistance we have been lucky enough to be able to fall back on strong community support."

Guests at the anniversary enjoyed a special catered lunch, a DJ and meeting Veterans and members of the community, all of whom share a common interest in the Fisher House.

"We are proud of the support we have been able to provide the families of our Veterans over the past two years and are looking forward to continuing this great mission into the future," Wright added.

Iron Mountain

Hosts Heart Health Fair

Organizers were very pleased with the good turnout for the Heart Health Fair on Valentine's Day, February 14.

"Quite a few people came out," said Linda Hayes, a VA Home Based Primary Care nurse and one of the Heart Health Fair organizers. "We had some people from the community and a good number of VA employees, but most were Veterans." According to organizers, nearly 150 people used the blood pressure cuffs available at the fair to check their blood pressure.

Linda Hayes, RN and one of the Heart Health Fair organizers, stands next to the Wheel of Fortune game that featured heart health questions.

As part of American Heart Month, one of the main objectives of the Heart Health Fair is to educate people regarding heart health and living a healthier lifestyle, according to Hayes. A goal of the VA is to decrease the incidence of heart disease and reduce the readmission rate for congestive heart failure, and the fair is part of that effort.

"We want to help people learn how to keep themselves healthy," said Mary Jo Vitton, a Medical Records Technician and another fair organizer. In addition to blood pressure cuffs, the Heart Health Fair featured healthy heart and lifestyle displays, a Physical Therapy booth, and a Wheel of Fortune game with prizes.

"The game featured heart health questions," said Vitton. "It was a great and fun way to learn about heart health."

Weight Loss Increases Vets' Quality of Life

A group of eight local Veterans recently completed a weight loss program. Since starting the program, these Veterans, as a group, lost 226 pounds, or 10.3% of their original weight.

Andrea Millan (right) speaks with the most recent Move! class during their last session of the four-month program.

"I am now motivated to walk five miles a day, and before I couldn't walk very far," said John Schumacher, who has participated in the program for eight months and lost 90 pounds. "Now my blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides are all normal."

Roger Newhouse is another Veteran who participated in the program for six months and lost 50 pounds since starting. "I use to be on so many meds from being overweight, 29 pills a day, and now most of them are gone," he said. "Now I only take one to two, and I like the changes a lot."

"The Move! Program educates Veterans on how to incorporate healthy lifestyle changes and food choices, which can be maintained for long term success," said Andrea Millan, a dietician and Move! coordinator. "Weight loss is one benefit of a healthier lifestyle, but improvements in health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol as well as an overall improved quality of life is the ultimate goal."

The Move! weight loss program is also held via telehealth at each of the Medical Center's seven Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

Making Wishes Come True For Veterans

Through its Butterfly Wish program the VA Medical Center is making wishes come true for Veterans. The program was initiated last fall by the Community Living Center (CLC) and Home Based Primary Care (HBPC). "It is similar to the Last Wish or Make a Wish Programs, where hospice and palliative care Veterans are given an opportunity to make a wish as they near the end of their lives, " said Selena Okler, Palliative RN. "OGJVAMC staff then collaborate to make their wishes come true."

To date, five wishes have been fulfilled. Some wishes have been simple, such as fixing an 8mm viewer so that the Veteran could edit his home movies, a dinner of spiral ham and hamburger helper mac and cheese specially prepared by the kitchen staff, and a Green Bay Packer themed party with Thai food.

Other wishes were more involved yet exceeded expectations. Fresh Maine lobster for two turned into a lobster feast for the whole family thanks to the efforts of Mary Bertucci, HBPC social worker. A request by the family of a lifelong Packers fan for a football signed by Aaron Rodgers, Clay Matthews and Donald Driver resulted in surprise presentation by Director Jim Rice of a football signed by the whole team, a handwritten card from Aaron Rodgers stating the team was thinking of him and wishing him well, and a Packers fleece blanket, pin and team photo.

Korean War Veteran/ CLC resident Zygmund "Ziggy" Zyskowski holding the football signed by the Green Bay Packers and listening as his wife, Sharon, reads a card from Aaron Rodgers.

Fulfilling all five of these wishes was a big deal for these Veterans and their families, and very much appreciated by them. Four of the five Veterans have passed away since their wish had been fulfilled, but the warm memories of their joy and smiles remain. OGJVAMC wishes to thank the following employees for making these wishes come true: Selena Okler, Mary Bertucci, Brent Freeman, Dr. Craig Holmes, Kevin Landowski, Holly Schroeder, Dave Andersen, and Jack Strong.

Circle of Care Clinic Treats the Whole Veteran

There is still a stigma in the minds of some Veteran about going to the Behavioral Health Service for treatment. OGJVAMC is changing that by integrating Primary Care and Mental Health services into a collocated and collaborative care environment. In 2011, OGJVAMC initiated and established the Circle of Care Clinic and located it within the Primary Care Service.

"The name, Circle of Care, really was born out of a discussion with one of our Native American Veterans," said Karen Krebsbach, LMSW. "He said that when you treat someone, you need to treat the whole person - physical, emotional, mental and spiritual, and that is what we are about." The Circle of Care team was nationally recognized in 2011 as one of eight top innovators in the VA for the Primary Care/ Mental Health Integration Initiative, receiving the "Your One in a Million Award."

Cindy Ziller, Cory Vedin, and Karen Krebsbach talk about the VA's integration of medical and mental health care services on WJNR's Veterans Information Hour. Not pictured: Kevin Connon, HT.

"We are an extension of your normal doctor's appointment," said Cory Vedin, LMSW and Clinic team coordinator. The Circle of Care Clinic, which can provide same day access, helps the doctor and Veteran develop the best integrated health care plan for whatever the problem is, be it depression, diabetes, insomnia, PTSD, or any other worries or emotional concerns affecting daily life. They also provide recommendations for any specialty care that may be needed and follow up on medication usage for the Primary Care Clinic.

"Veterans are really surprised when we call them to see how they are doing with their meds," said Cindy Ziller, NP. "They say, 'wow, you really care,' and we do because it is our passion."

"What we are finding is that, while some Veterans are resistant to seeing a psychiatrist in the Behavioral Health Service, they are much more open to coming to see us in the Circle of Care Clinic," said Krebsbach.

Facility Reaps Energy Savings

Energy saving efforts by OGJVAMC is reaping significant energy savings and a $13,835 rebate check from DTE Energy. The Medical Center participated in DTE Energy's Your Energy Savings Program by installing an energy recovery unit (ERU) for the facility's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system.

"The ERU uses conditioned air, which is exhausted to pre-heat or pre-cool – depending on the season – unconditioned outside intake air," said Art Ontto, Chief of the Medical Center's Engineering Service. Another ERU will be completed later this spring.

"Each ERU will decrease our usage of natural gas," said Ontto, "which is estimated to result in a total savings for the Medical Center of over $57,000 annually in natural gas costs."

James W. Rice, Medical Center Director, accepts a DTE Energy check for $13,835 from Art Ontto, Chief of Engineering. The check represents the efforts of OGJVAMC's energy savings program

"We strive to be good stewards of our natural resources and, by extension, good neighbors to our community," said Jim Rice, Medical Center Director.

Oscar G. Johnson Has "Firsts" For Internship

Jaclyn Vedin recently completed a nine month dietetic internship that was noted for a couple of "firsts." Ms. Vedin is the first dietetic intern at the Medical Center in the Nutrition and Environmental Support Service (NESS). She is also the first intern at OGJVAMC participating in a distance learning program. Ms. Vedin was the only student from Michigan to be accepted in Iowa State's distance dietetic program.

Left to right: Nancy Whitens, Dietician, Jaclyn Vedin, Dietetic Intern, Bridget Galas, Dietician, and Nicole Kleist, Chief, NESS

Nurse Returns From 22-Month Deployment

James W. Rice (R), Director and Andrea Collins (L), Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care presents Jill Bruno-Enright, RN, (center) with a VA Recognition Award for dedicated service to her country as both a military officer and Veterans Affairs nurse.

Jill Bruno-Enright is an 11-year Veteran of the Army Reserves and National Guard and is currently a Major with the Texas Army National Guard. Ms. Bruno-Enright just completed a 22-month deployment, including eleven months in Iraq, where she served as Behavioral Health Officer/Combat Stress Officer. She has been employed at the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center since 2009, and serves as VA's Community Based Outpatient Clinics Coordinator for the Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin.

Jesse Brown

Veterans Display Art, Talents

Veterans showcased their artwork and talents during the 3rd Annual Creative Arts Competition.

Of the 80 artists and performers to compete locally, nearly half were recognized to advance to the VA's national competition later this year.

Ernest Alonzo (center) sings "Moonlight Becomes You" for a crowded room at the 3rd Annual Creative Arts Competition. Alonzo was one of 40 Veterans to advance to the VA's national competition later this year

The competition highlighted the importance of creative arts therapy. Veterans receiving care at Jesse Brown VAMC can participate in the expressive therapy that uses the creative process of making art to improve physical and emotional well-being.

Veterans showcased their artwork during the 3rd Annual Creative Arts Competition. More than 40 artists and performers advanced to the VA's national competition later this year

"The competition is an opportunity to showcase how arts are effective as a therapeutic treatment," said Kristen Bouwman, music therapist.

The self-expression helps Veterans resolve issues, develop and manage their feelings, reduce stress, and improve self-esteem and awareness.

Film Production Featuring Integrative Medicine Visits

Two years ago, Patrick Crehan's health was headed on a downward spiral. Suffering from the psychological effects of combat, the Iraq War Veteran attempted suicide 12 times and had shunned his friends and family.

"I was completely isolated. Some people would bring over groceries because I wasn't eating," he said. "I didn't know where to turn to."

Crehan said he reached out to the staff at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago. "As a soldier, you are trained to be proud," he said. "I was hiding it, but I saw this place and said 'I need help.' It's been a complete 180 from the time I walked into this hospital to now."

Crehan is one of several Veterans and clinicians who participated in the making of a film about the positive benefits of Complementary and Integrative Medicine such as yoga, meditation, Tai chi and Qigong. The East Orange VA New Jersey Health Care System is producing the video for patients at the War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center, but hopes to eventually make the film available to more Veterans.

Dr. Eric Proescher, psychologist at Jesse Brown VAMC, is interviewed for a film featuring information about the VA's work with Complementary and Integrative Medicine

"We've formed partnerships with some of the leading mind-body experts to teach Veterans a master class so they can learn these techniques right in the comfort of their own homes," said Anna Rusiewicz, Ph.D, and Health Science Specialist at the East Orange VA. Dr. Rusiewicz wrote the grant proposal funding the one-year pilot project to make the film.

"This will be a portable toolkit empowering Veterans to learn mind-body techniques and give them choices so they can try several," Dr. Rusiewicz said.

Veterans interested in learning more about Complementary and Integrative Medicine should talk with their health care provider.

Madison

Patient Centered Care

The members of the Madison VAH Patient-Centered Care Committee

The Madison VAH recently launched a Patient-Centered Care Share Site. This website is a tool-kit to help services develop and successfully complete patient-centered care projects. Information available on the share site includes the names and contact information of the Patient-Centered Care Committee members, a list of ongoing patient-centered care projects, forms for submitting patient-centered care projects, as well as a variety of other resources intended to assist hospital staff with developing patient-centered care projects. All of the projects are submitted to the Patient-Centered Care (PCC) Committee via the website with a representative of the PCC committee assigned as a contact person for each project. The committee member receives updates from the project's coordinator in order to provide status reports at the PCC Committee meeting. Completed projects will be posted on the share site to showcase the innovative patient-centered efforts of hospital staff.

CLC opens

A 16-bed Community Living Center (CLC) opened in January. Unlike the CLCs at many VA hospitals, Madison's, unit will provide transitional care to Veterans who not require the hospital's 87 acute care beds, but are not ready to be discharged.

The CLC frees up acute care beds for Veterans who need them, while providing a state-of-the-art, comfortable and more home-like setting for other patients who need to remain hospitalized for intermediate periods up to several months. It didn't take long after the CLC opened for the appreciative feedback to arrive.

The CLC is the best thing to ever happen for me," according to the Madison VA Hospital CLC's first patient, shown here. The CLC took in its first patients Jan. 23

From the CLC's first patient: "Low and behold, I am wheeled into a new phase of the Veterans Hospital (and) what a pleasant surprise, not a nursing home but a very well planned out Rehab Center with excellent nursing care—Housekeeping, PT, OT, Rec T and all the comforts of home—A GREAT BIG THANK YOU. The CLC is the best thing to ever happen for me."

The CLC includes four hospice care suites to provide comfortable and family-friendly surroundings for Veterans near the end of life.

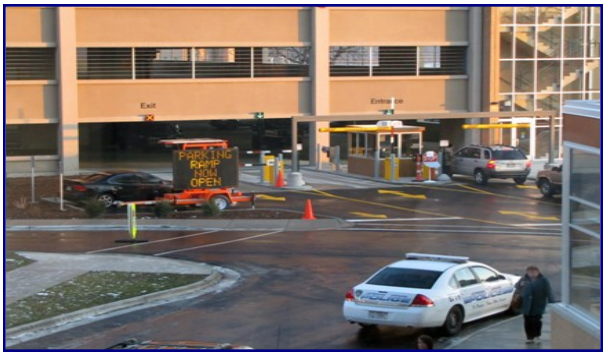
Patient Safety Fair

In honor of National Patient Safety Awareness Week, the hospital hosted a Patient Safety Fair on March 5th.

Cathy Stampfli uses the Glitterbug Handwash Show to display hand germs and discuss proper handwashing techniques

Veterans, visitors and staff were invited to the fair which highlighted the many ways the hospital staff keep our veteran patients safe. There was a wide variety of displays that showcased the 2012 Patient Safety Goals including demonstrations on root cause analysis processes, hand hygiene, safe patient handling, and proper telephone triage techniques for suicide prevention.

Madison 'ramps it up'



A temporary portable sign announces the opening of a long-awaited parking ramp at the Madison VA Hospital on its first day of operation Dec. 19. The $9.7 million ramp holds 826 vehicles and added about 600 parking spots to the Madison hospital's grounds

Telehealth – Cost Efficient Model of Care

As modern healthcare continues a bold transition to the future, Telehealth has shown promising results in providing a cost-efficient model of care, meeting growing patient demands, and improving access to health care — particularly in underserved and rural regions of the country.

Telehealth at the Madison VA Hospital uses modern telecommunications technology to improve access to top quality health care services to Veterans

William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital is developing this emerging technology to reach patients who require a wide range of medical services. The Madison VA currently provides Telehealth services in Telemental Health, Teleaudiology, Tele Pain Coping Group, TeleSCI (spinal cord injury), TeleMove!, and the Telespecialties of Rheumatology, Infectious Disease and Thoracic Surgery.

These are a few highlights of the Telehealth initiatives from Madison:

Telemental health
As one of the pioneering departments to utilize Telehealth services, Madison's Mental Health Department has been caring for Veterans for about a decade, with services initially being provided between Madison and Rockford, IL. Since that time, Telemental health has expanded throughout southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois with over 100 providers offering a range of services to patients.

Teleaudiology
The audiology department has successfully integrated Teleaudiology as a vital form of patient care. Acting as a lead facility for Teleaudiology pilot sites, the Madison VA has been tracking and implementing state-of-the-art technologies that enable audiology procedures to be conducted from a distance. Teleaudiology services such as hearing aid fittings and follow-up appointments are provided at local VA clinics in Beaver Dam and Baraboo, WI. Future plans are to extend Teleaudiology services to Janesville, WI, as well as assisting with appointments in Rhinelander, WI, and Iron Mountain, MI

Tele Pain Coping Group
The Madison VA offers the "Resilient Coping with Chronic Pain" Skills Group, both in-person and via Telehealth, for veterans suffering from chronic pain. The Telehealth videoconference link with local VA clinics in Janesville, WI, and both Rockford and Freeport, IL, allows Veterans who are dealing with chronic pain issues to attend group sessions and receive education and support. Patients learn practical techniques for improving their ability to cope with pain on a daily basis as well as how to manage pain flares. The Telehealth link makes this resource accessible to Veterans so that they can take charge of their own pain management and learn the tools to optimize their own health outcomes.

Spinal Cord Injury Telehealth
The first Spinal Cord Telehealth visit in VISN 12 occurred in September 2011, and linked a Veteran at the Madison VA with a Specialist at the Milwaukee VA Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center. Members of the Madison Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders Primary Care team serve as the Telepresenters for the visits, which originate from the Madison VA SCI/D exam room. Using state-of-the-art technologies, Veterans with spinal cord injuries have improved access to specialty medical consultations that may include, but are not limited to, pressure ulcers, urological, or bowel management issues. They may also receive consultations by physical and occupational therapists, post-operative follow-up, care coordination for complex psychosocial concerns and discharge planning. SCI Telehealth is an exciting way for qualified Veterans with general medical concerns to access their specialists without traveling to where the specialists are located.

TeleMOVE!
MOVE! is a national weight management program designed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health. In 2009, the Nutrition and Food Department at Madison expanded MOVE! to include outreach programs via Telehealth to the clinics in Baraboo, Beaver Dam and Janesville WI, and in Freeport, IL CBOCs. On average, between 85 and 100 patients each month are seen from these locations.

Milwaukee

Kayaking: Getting Back on the Water

Everyone was already in the water, except Veteran Roman Tatarinowicz. Finally, he was the last one in. "I was born and raised on the water," he told a therapist, "but I haven't been in it since my diagnosis." It was easy to see his excitement as he retold stories of boating with his father when he was younger. "I really didn't think I'd be able to be back here. I'd love to be able to come down here every week if that works!"

He was one of the first to participate in a pilot kayaking program started on the Milwaukee VA Medical Center Spinal Cord Injury Unit. The program is the first of its kind in a national program for Veterans called Team River Runner. The VA's team starts Veterans in the Physical Therapy pool.

That's right, kayak in the pool. Therapists fit two, single, sit-on-top kayaks in the water. It's an ideal situation for Veterans to get comfortable with the water, the kayaks, and get acquainted with our wonderful volunteers. Each Veteran will participate in two or three kayaking sessions over the winter and spring months to work on their strokes and to help the volunteers become familiar with each person's particular adaptations. Once the ice melts off the local waters, the Veterans' summer will be filled with chances to kayak with their friends and families on local ponds, rivers, and lakes.

The goals for this program are to provide Veterans with an additional healthy leisure activity, an outlet for physical and emotional release, a social network for Veterans and family, and instill a sense of confidence as their kayaking abilities grow.

Tatarinowicz (red kayak) exemplifies the ability of a recreation program such as kayaking to change or improve a person's quality of life. Through time, patience, and practice, each Veteran will be able to add yet another talent to his or her long list of accomplishments.

Veterans Visit The Frozen Tundra

A group of 10 Veterans from Spinal Cord Injury, Palliative Care and the Community Living Center got first-class treatment from the reigning Super Bowl champs.

The Green Bay Packers invited Milwaukee VA Veterans to Lambeau Field for a special day to soak in some gridiron history, rub shoulder pads with a current Packer and find out what it's like to walk through that tunnel onto the field for game day.

"It was a great day where we got to talk with old friends, meet new ones, and tour the great Lambeau Field," said Veteran Dan Vanderhoef.

The day started at the Medical Center where Veterans loaded the bus to make the two-hour trip north.

Upon arrival, the group was escorted to Curly's Pub for lunch on the Packers. Halfway through lunch, Tramon Williams, a starting cornerback for the Packers, was a surprise guest. He signed souvenirs and took pictures with all of the Veterans

"It was so nice of him to stop in!" an excited Randy Rick said. "I was hoping we'd meet a player."

After lunch, we made our way to the Packer Hall of Fame. Veterans let loose a little bit and took humorous pictures throughout the interactive displays. After reading about Curly Lambeau, Vince Lombardi, and numerous players, looking over various pictures, and comparing the old equipment (or lack thereof) with what is used and worn now, the group gathered for a tour of the stadium.

Our guides explained the history of the corporation, the meaning of the atrium, and the typical game day occurrences throughout the stadium. After getting a magnificent view from a sixth floor suite, we were then taken down to the same entrance to the field the players use. The feeling of walking through that tunnel and having the door open in front of you was quite inspiring. The day was rounded out by making a stop in the Pro Shop to do some shopping, and then loaded the bus for back home.

Each Veteran had their own highlight to the day, but one thing was uniform throughout the group – everyone gave a resounding "Thank you" to the Packer organization and Jessie Micke from the community outreach team for making the trip possible.

Women's Rightful Place in Military History

If Wilma Vaught learned anything from her time in the Air Force – or from anyone else for that matter – it might be to never tell her something can't happen.

While she was still coming through the ranks, it was impossible for a female officer to get promoted beyond lieutenant colonel, except by special appointment. And by the time that rule changed, it was still pretty hard to make it much further.

When she pinned stars on her shoulder boards, she was only one of seven, active-duty females who were generals. "My line for that is, 'I worked longer, harder and smarter,'" she says.

It's that same driving force that took her from the Air Force to become the driving force behind the Women's Memorial in Washington, DC. It wasn't her idea, but it probably wouldn't have happened, either, without her.

Vaught, now 82 and still promoting the memorial and women's rightful place in military history, and visited the VA for a talk open to the entire community.

The Women's Memorial located at the entrance of Arlington Cemetery is the only major national landmark of its kind to honor all servicewomen. It officially opened Oct. 18, 1997, after more than a decade of planning. But don't give credit for the idea to Vaught. "Not me," she said. "It was other people who had the idea. I'm the implementer."

It started with no money, no space and a staff of two, and grew to what it is today. For that, you can credit Vaught.

She was still serving as the commander of the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command and was chairing the NATO committee on women in the Armed Forces when Congress was planning a memorial. The Air Force asked her to speak to Congress, but it conflicted with her NATO duties and it didn't happen.

"That's the first I heard about it, and I forgot about it," she said. "I ended up retiring (from the Air Force) in 1985 and planned on my next job as a consultant. In November of 1986, I got a call and asked to join the board. I had no intention of becoming the president just felt that as a woman and a general officer, that this was something I ought to do for other women." The only other person who agreed to work full-time was a woman who was enlisted in the Women's Army Corps during World War II.

"When most people retire, they convert back to their first name. But when I started very early in the game (on the memorial), I told her the only thing I think we had going for us was my general officer rank. It was the only way to get people to notice and pay attention. So I was still 'The General.'"

And she talked. And talked. And talked.

"I think I was averaging somewhere between 70 and 100 speeches a year, overseas and all across the U.S. I remember one month of March that I was only home for three days, and they were weekends. "At first it was donated time and I never got reimbursed for some of those first trips. I finally reached a point where I couldn't continue, so I got the whole sum of $500 a month. It finally got a little higher than that," she said. And people listened.

They heard about women who were pilots before the 1970s, and women who were POWs, two facts that almost disappeared to history. They learned about the women who accomplished great feats and others who just wanted to serve their country and make a difference.

"I got some who didn't agree with it, but what was surprising to me is men, in particular, said, 'It's about time.' It's kind of an amusing thing. I heard it so often, I thought it would be a good thing to make a T-shirt with that saying on it, but it was one of our worst sellers." She eventually convinced Congress to kick in $9.5 million. She and the board brought in the rest for a total of about $47 million. And the passion she had in 1986 is still as strong today.

"We need this to tell the story of women's service to our country," said Vaught, 82. "It was being lost. We are recovering some of it. This has served as a vehicle, as a voice, in a very public and very prominent way, right at the gate of Arlington Cemetery. Kids who visit see these women who served. They can go into the register and look up their mother's and other family members. It's incredible.

"Needless to say, this is the greatest accomplishment of my life that we got that memorial done," she added. "The reason we got it done is for the World War II women and others who set the path for me."

North Chicago

New Strategic Plan

Who came up with Lovell FHCC's new Strategic Plan? It was a question posed to the audience at the quarterly Town Hall meetings.

There were snickers as people read their choices, which included "Charlie Brown," "The Chicago Bears," "The Green Bay Packers," and "Ghandi."

The right answer – "Leadership, staff from multiple occupations at the facility, and stakeholders to include representatives from American Federation of Government Employees and National Nurses United, as well as Rosalind Franklin University and several Veterans organizations" – was obvious for a reason. The slide was a teaching point designed to illustrate the collaborative effort that produced the plan.

It took months of work, including many meetings, on-site and off-site retreats, and multiple revisions and improvements at the hands of the facility's Executive Steering Committee, and finally, the plan for "The Way Forward" debuted this month at Town Halls and several smaller employee meetings. Ultimately the plan will be promoted in a marketing blitz that will include posters, signs, and computer and TV screens throughout the facility.

Lovell FHCC Director Patrick Sullivan stressed to leadership during the development phases that the Strategic Plan belongs to employees. "It's not something being pushed down on staff from the top," he said. "We're all invested in it. From the beginning, we gathered the most representative team we could to ensure that we came up with the best way forward."

Whether staff work in the Facility Support Directorate, with patients, or in administration, the Strategic Plan is "relevant to every one of our 3,000 employees."

The first question employees need answered – What is a strategic plan and why should I care?" – are summed up in the 15-minute slide presentation that introduces the mission, vision, five "Guiding Principles," 17 Initiatives, and how it all relates to staff and most-importantly, patients.

The "what" is this: As the FHCC has embarked on its second year as the first federal health care center, "It is important as an organization to reflect on the progress made, lessons learned, and how to strategically position the organization for future success," said Chris Moorman, Program Specialist in the business unit, as he narrated the slides.

Moorman, working with Patrick Hull, Assistant Director of Resources, led the team that formalized the well-ordered strategic plan process. The process itself was approved when Lovell FHCC was created in 2010 as a result of the integration of the former Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes and North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

An organizational "strategic plan" is necessary to move the organization forward and ensure Lovell FHCC remains "a provider" and "employer of choice," in North Chicago, Lake County and beyond.

"Patients are at the core," continued Moorman as he introduced the Strategic Plan at the Town Halls. "Our core is made up of the men and women we serve. They are what defines the organization's purpose and drives our plan."

A strategic framework circle that leaders hope all of Lovell's approximately 3,000 employees will soon recognize flashed on the screen. The words "staff and volunteers" are depicted on the circle diagram encircling the inner core labeled "patients."

"The staff and patients go hand-in-hand," Moorman continued. "Both are critical to defining and fulfilling our mission. You are the human touch ... You have the awesome responsibility of setting the example of excellent care to every patient, every time." Sound familiar? "Excellent Care, Every Patient, Every Time" is the facility's customer service motto.

Next, the presentation gets closer to answering, "Why should I care?" The slide show goes on to explain the five guiding principles of Quality, Readiness, Experience of Care, Sustainability and Innovation – which will serve as the long-term direction for the FHCC – followed by mission, vision and values that round out the strategic framework.

It's when the facility's four Strategic Objectives (highest priorities) for the next two years – Patient-Centered Care, Lean, Talent Management and Innovation – are linked to specific initiatives that employees get a glimpse of how their jobs fit in the big picture.

Ten of the 17 initiatives fall under Patient-Centered Care and include adopting a "Good to Great: Transformational Leadership Model;" implementing the holistic and patient-centered Planetree model of care; relocating the Kenosha, WI, Community Based Outreach Clinic; bringing Room-Service-Style dining to inpatients; and constructing a new medical/dental clinic on the East campus.

Some Patient-Centered Care initiatives have already been implemented, for example, the new Caregiver Support Center is an example of the Planetree model. A new outreach committee potentially reached hundreds of Veterans at the recent "Grayslake Salutes Our Military," and the committee has compiled a list of community events to participate in this year.

Staff development is the top priority under the Talent Management objective, followed by improved efforts in the areas of succession planning, retention, recruitment and staff recognition, as well as human resources process improvement.

In later phases, under Innovation, the FHCC will create a state-of-the-art education and simulation center, and develop an interventional radiology program. Innovation initiatives will ensure Lovell FHCC operates "on the forefront of technology, research, medical best-practices, and integrated healthcare delivery," Moorman said.

The presentation concluded with a slide asking employees to think about the implications of the Strategic Framework. "It is only through your support and dedication that our plan will be successful," Moorman said.

From Private Practice to Treating Homeless Veterans

One of the main reasons soldiers have to leave the front lines is because of dental problems.

"When I heard that, I thought, 'Okay, I can fix that,'" said Dentist Dr. William Hartel, who, at the age of 52, has just joined the Army.

"I love travel and doing dental work around the world," said Hartel, interviewed in the FHCC dental clinic, where his new full-time job – after 21 years in private practice – is to treat homeless Veterans. And now that he is in the Army, his second job very well might send him anywhere in the world on short notice.

"I'm not scared," said Hartel, shrugging confidently and smiling. "I'll go wherever they need me."

The new Army officer was sworn in at the rank of Major by his childhood friend Senator Mark Kirk at the FHCC in January, not long before the U.S. Senator suffered a stroke. Now Kirk is recovering, and Hartel is waiting to hear what his first assignment will be after the requisite Officer Basic Course in Texas.

Kirk is the reason Hartel decided to join the Army. "He said, 'You should try it.' He had been talking to me about the Navy, but when I called them, they said I was too old," Hartel said. "So I called the Army."

Kirk (right), a Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve, asked to administer the oath of office to Hartel (left). The two grew up together on the North Shore. They attended grade school and high school together and frequently sailed together. Hartel also credits Kirk with getting him to come back home to Chicago after moving to St. Louis for 30 years.

"I heard about Lovell FHCC from him," Hartel said. "He said, 'Why don't you come home?' So I applied here last spring, and now here I am."

Hartel notes that he's a Cubs fan, another reason to come home. In fact, in his "spare time," in the 1990s, Hartel wrote and published a book about Wrigley Field, titled, "A Day at the Park: In Celebration Wrigley Field." The book, which features thousands of pictures, most taken from dawn to dusk during one day, was a *Chicago Tribune* best seller.

"A Day in the Park" is just one of many stories – fiction and non-fiction – Hartel has published over the years online and elsewhere. Many of his articles and published photographs come from the humanitarian missions he's volunteered for in far-flung locales including Guatemala and Alaska.

His 10-day stint in Alaska introduced Hartel to the Army. In keeping with his sense of adventure, Hartel volunteered to go to Gambell, Alaska, to provide dental care to Yup'ik Eskimos.

"It was 40 below. I was on an island of about 700 people," Hartel remembered. "I showed up, and it was dark. There was no equipment and no records. They told me, 'The Army will be here.' And sure enough, at 2 p.m. they arrived with a clinic in a box on their plane.

"I was very impressed," he said. "Everything worked, which for a dentist is very rare."

Hartel said his drive to try new things stems, in a large part, from a near-death experience following a major surgery a few years ago. "It gave me a different outlook," Hartel said. "Now I have no fear. It opened up my mind." "I woke up and knew I didn't want to be a suburban dentist anymore," he said.

The timing was right to join the Army, he said, because his children are mostly grown. Two, in their 20s, are off on their own. One teaches English for the French government on an island in the Indian Ocean. The other is an engineering student in college. His youngest, a 16-year-old son, is expressing an interest in the Army.

"The Army just fits right now," said Hartel, who also is a competitive ballroom dancer and a private pilot. "I thought, 'here's an adventure.' As long as it's fixing teeth, I'm all over it."

Bad things happen, Hartel said about his long recovery after the fateful surgery. "But you can't go through life afraid. No one gets hurt sitting on the couch but you also don't go anywhere."

Hartel said he's looking forward to getting his first Army orders, but until then he's content working as a dentist at Lovell FHCC, which continues to impress him. "The equipment is top-notch for one thing, and I'm blown away by the quality of care here, the comprehensiveness of care and the dedication to care of patients here."

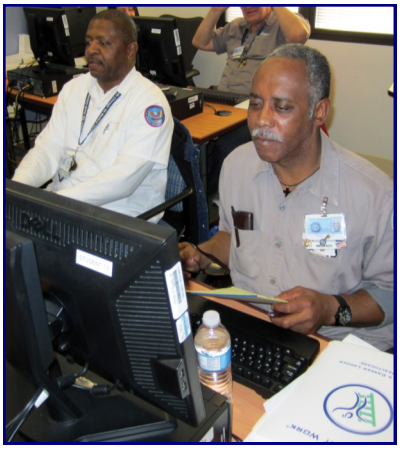
School At Work Program

One student is using the School at Work (SAW) class as a test to see if he wants to go back to school this spring to get certified in substance abuse counseling.

"I want to further my career," said Lovell FHCC employee Michael Brazzil, who works in housekeeping. "And it gives me a chance to get back in the classroom before deciding if I'm going back to school."

Another student in the inaugural class of SAW at Lovell FHCC is interested in management and hopes SAW "will guide" him in that direction.

"I'm just trying to continue my education and get some additional learning and become more aware of what opportunities are available," said Marcus Gregory, who currently is a food service worker and holds a degree in food management.



Lovell FHCC employees Marcus Gregory, left, and Michael Brazzil, right, work on School at Work subjects on their own pace. They are part of Lovell's first SAW class, set to graduate in June

Only ten Lovell FHCC employees were selected from 40 applicants to participate in the first SAW class, which started in the fall of 2011.

SAW is a six-month program that allows employees to learn on the job. During weekly class meetings, students learn new skills, brush up on existing ones and/or explore the option of continuing education. For some, SAW is a stepping stone to a new career opportunity.

"I foresee a lot of opportunities for everyone who applies themselves to get what they can out of it," said Gregory, who has worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. "It gives us a better understanding of our options."

Topics covered during the six months of class range from "Patient Safety and Satisfaction" to grammar, math, reading and writing. Classes are split between the classroom and computer lab, so students also have the opportunity to work on computer-based skills.

SAW applicants complete a reading assessment and an interview. As part of the course, mentors help students develop Career and Learning Plans to help solidify their goals for SAW.

Lovell FHCC School at Work students are, from left to right, front row: Jennifer McCraw, Sharon Johnson, Valerie Johnson, Clamesia Collier and Desmond Knuckles. In the back row, pictured are SAW Coach Monyca Fisher, Marcus Gregory, Bill Crandall and Coach Adrienne Fisher. Not pictured: Gemma Arandia, Michael Brazzil

Brazzil, who has worked at the Lovell FHCC for nearly four years, was excited to be selected. "It's a real good program. I heard a lot of good things about it. I'm en-joying it and looking forward to the rest," he said at a recent class.

In addition to Brazzil and Gregory, the other students in the first SAW class are Gemma Arandia, Prosthetics; William Crandall, Environmental Services; Clamesia Collier and Desmond Knuckles, Nutrition and Foods; Sharon Johnson from Fisher Clinic; Valerie Johnson, Human Resources - Military Personnel; and Jennifer McCraw from Women's Wellness at USS Red Rover. One student dropped from the program.

Clamesia Collier, a Lovell FHCC employee enrolled in School at Work, works online in the computer lab. Lovell's first SAW class will graduate in June

Gregory said he appreciates the chance to participate in SAW. "I'm sure this will be a good springboard for us and future candidates," he said. "I look for all the opportunities that might be open. This allows you to have some dreams."

Panel Art Fair

U.S. Navy Veteran Leticia "Letty" Knight decided to use the panel art fair as a reason to pick up a paint brush again.

Navy Veteran Letty Knight, Education and Training Specialist entered her painting titled, "Looking through the Eyes of Freedom." She said it depicts what the service member "wants to see."

"This is the biggest painting I've ever done, and I was nervous," said Knight, who works at the FHCC as an education specialist. "We had about three months, and I was going to school and working. It was challenging." Knight's painting depicts the face of a service member wearing goggles to shield his eyes from the glare of the desert sun. Below the edge of the service member's helmet, the goggles reflect what he wishes to see, as well as what he does see, Knight said. The Twin Towers figure prominently in the center of his vision. A joyful reunion with a child fills one eye piece, and bust of a military member, flag and female fighter are depicted on the other side."The bust represents anyone who has served, who we hope made it home," she said. "As for the goggles, it shows someone is watching over me. That's what it seemed like during the time I was painting it in the basement. It seemed like he was watching me."

As she studied her own painting, Knight decided it could be the face of a female service member, too. "It kind of looks like it could be a woman, under the nose," she said, pleased with the revelation.

One of the reasons Knight chose to depict a female in uniform in the reflection was to make people more aware of the role of women in the military today, she noted. "You don't see females in combat in the media enough. The focus is usually on men."

The fair was sponsored by the Koziol Family Foundation, which also has sponsored yoga classes and paid for speakers for mental health programs. Attendees voted for their favorite piece, and voting was also open to Facebook followers online. The winning artwork will be incorporated into a mural at the FHCC later this summer. Other pieces will be displayed throughout the facility.

“Thanks for your courage,” said Joanne Starzec, president and CEO of the Koziol Foundation, at the opening ceremony. “You’ve put your heart, your soul, on display for everyone to see, and by doing so, you raise the awareness of every individual who sees it, of the cost, the price we pay for freedom.”

Expressive art is an important compliment to alternative medicine, said Navy Capt. and Dr. Norman Lee, deputy chief medical executive, in remarks at the opening ceremony. “It enhances the healing process,” he said, noting that 18 of the panels will be displayed in the mental health wing of the facility, where many patients are recovering from the “signature wounds” of today’s wars – post-traumatic stress and brain injuries.

“These panels really depict the dedication to duty, by active duty service members, Veterans and staff here...I think for each of you, one panel will touch your soul,” Lee said.

“Why We Serve” was created by Lovell FHCC Assistant Canteen Chief Kim Wasilewski. He said before he started working at the Veterans Administration more than a decade ago, “I never considered our Veterans and what they did for us. But when I came here, and saw the Veterans with the missing limbs and cracked minds, I realized people gave up their whole lives. The purpose of my piece is to show the things unseen when our heroes sacrifice for us.”

“Three Reasons I Am Alive,” created by employee Erica Jeffers, was one of more than three-dozen paintings entered in a mural panel art fair. Voting was open to all attendees and others via voting on Facebook. The winning piece will be incorporated into a mural to be displayed in the facility’s new Ambulatory Care Center. Other pieces will be displayed throughout the facility

Tomah

Veterans Upfront For Snowflake Ski Jump

Unseasonable warm weather and a bird’s eye view of the ski hill gave Veterans the perfect setting for watching the 89th Annual Westby Snowflake Ski Jump in Timber Coulee, WI.

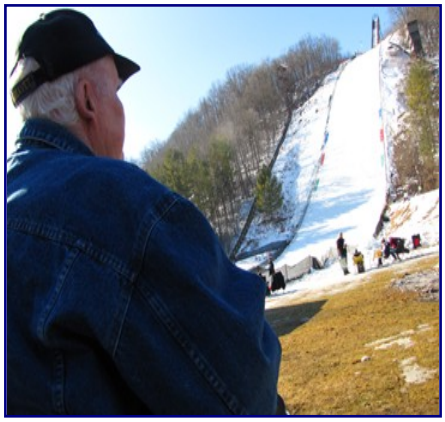
After the opening ceremonies, the day’s warm sun delayed the start of the ski jump competition, but left ample opportunity for Veterans and Tomah VA staff to enjoy the day.

While Westby Ski Jump staff worked to perfect the ramp of the ski jump and entertain the large, waiting crowd, the Tomah Veterans on hand were partaking in the concessions and s‘mores toasted by recreation therapists Erik Harvieux and Jennifer Conzemius.

Korean War Veteran Henry Hanson and his fellow Veterans staked claim to prime real estate along the west side of the outrun to see the action as ski jumpers from five countries launched from Westby's 118-meter hill.

Above from left to right: Tomah VA Veterans Bill Taylor, Brandon Harrell, Rudy Paulson (face is hidden), Kevin Foley, and Herb Hanson watch the Westby Snowflake Ski Jump competition in Timber Coulee, WI

The group's front row seats gave them a view of some of the longest jumps of the weekend, including some by Christian Frieberg of the St. Paul Ski Club, the overall winner of the two-day event, who beat the field with jumps in excess of 120 meters.



Herb Hanson watches the Westby Snowflake Ski Jump competition in Timber Coulee, WI. Hanson, a Veteran of the Korean War and childhood ski jumper, attended the ski jump with fellow Veterans from the Tomah VA

Veterans Benefits Fair

Veterans, VA staff and members of the public visited the Tomah VA, learning about the numerous benefits available to Veterans through the VA, state and county organizations. "(The health benefits fair) was a terrific way for Veterans to learn more about the benefits they have earned by serving our nation," said Toby Lane, the administrative assistant to the Tomah VA associate director and Veterans Health Benefits Fair organizer. "We wanted people, even people who were not Veterans, to learn about the benefits available to them or the Veteran in their life."

Seated from left, Sarah Cole and Donna Siekert from the Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Program explained their program to Army Veteran Matthew Goetzman (left) and many members of the public and Veterans

Representatives were on hand from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Monroe County Veteran County Service Officers, LaCrosse Vet Center, Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network, VA Human Resources, Veterans Assistance Center, healthcare eligibility and benefits, Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Veterans programs, Women Veterans Healthcare, home care services and long-term care, mental health programs, homeless programs, voluntary services, My HealtheVet and health promotion.

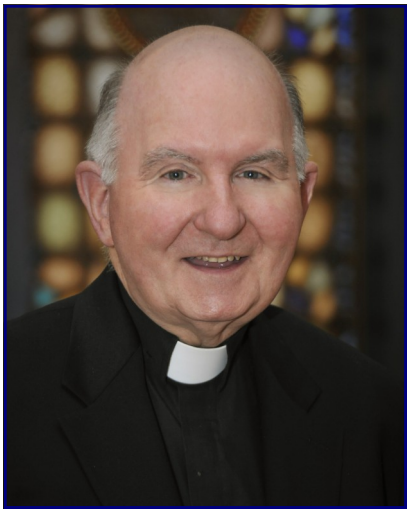
Emergency Preparedness

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have a fun new way of teaching the importance of emergency preparedness. A new graphic novel, "Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic" demonstrates the importance of being prepared in an entertaining way that people of all ages will enjoy. Readers follow Todd, Julie, and their dog Max as a strange new disease begins spreading, turning ordinary people into zombies. Visit the following website with your family to learn more: www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies_novella.htm.

More emergency preparedness tips on page 24.

Awards and Recognition

Hines Chaplain Honored By Pope Benedict



For more than 10 years, Veterans at the Hines VA Hospital have benefitted from the spiritual guidance, experience, kindness and overall generosity of spirit displayed by **Father James Burnett**, Chief of the hospital's Chaplain Service. Burnett was recognized for his hard work and dedication with a special honor bestowed upon him by Pope Benedict XVI. As a Prelates of Honor, he will now be known as Monsignor Burnett, a very significant honor within the Catholic Church.

Monsignor Burnett was nominated for this honor by the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA (AMS). This is the first time that the Archdiocese has requested Papal Honors (Monsignor) for a VA Chaplain. The recent Papal Announcement is in recognition of his work within the VA System as the President of NCVACC (The National Conference of VA Catholic Chaplains), the organization that serves the 320 Catholic Priests in various salaried positions within the VA System. Monsignor Burnett held the title of President of this organization for six years. In that period the membership in NCVACC tripled in size and Monsignor Burnett and the NCVACC Board and also brought into existence new Standards and a new Code of Ethics for the organization.

"I am truly humbled and honored to receive this Papal Appointment," said Monsignor Burnett. "As a Veteran of the Air Force, I feel privileged to work with and for our nation's heroes. I can't think of a more rewarding job."

There will be a special Mass sometime in the future celebrating this incredible honor.

Commission on Cancer's Outstanding Achievement Award

The **Hines VA Oncology Program** was recently awarded the Commission on Cancer's Outstanding Achievement Award from the American College of Surgeons-Commission on Cancer. The Hines team received this award upon the completion of its triennial accreditation survey. This is the second time Hines VA has met the stringent qualifications of this award and it is a very big honor for the hospital.

Members of the Hines Cancer Committee (sitting L to R) Margo St. Julien, CTR - Oncology Program Coordinator, Nirmala Bhoopalam, MD – Cancer Committee Chair & Chief of Hematology/Oncology, Donald Thomas, MD – Cancer Liaison Physician to the Commission on Cancer & Chief of Thoracic Surgery Standing L to R Kathleen Waller, CTR – Oncology Data Analyst, Richard Garza, MD – Radiation Oncologist, Rajul Shah, MD – Pathologist

"The Outstanding Achievement Award (OAA) is designed to recognize cancer programs that strive for excellence in providing quality care to cancer patients," said Dr. Jack Bulmash, Hines Chief of Staff. "The cancer care here at Hines is truly amazing and this award recognizes our staff for the great work they do every day for our Veterans with cancer."

A facility receives the OAA following the on-site evaluation by a physician surveyor during which the facility demonstrates a Commendation level of compliance with seven standards that represent the full scope of the cancer program and also receives a compliance rating for the remaining 29 standards.

The seven standards that form the basis of the OAA criteria are drawn from the following six areas of program activity:

cancer committee leadership
cancer data management
clinical management
research
community outreach
quality improvement

At Hines, the Oncology Program is coordinated by the Cancer Committee through the Cancer Registry/ Oncology Program Office.

Congratulations to the Hines VA Cancer Committee that is comprised of HVA personnel involved in the care of the cancer patient.

CNA Receives Hands & Heart Award

James W. Rice (r), OGJVAMC Director, presents the VA's Hands & Heart Award to Elizabeth (Liz) M. Barker (l), a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Ms. Elizabeth Barker is one of only 54 VA employees recognized nationally with this prestigious award for demonstrating exceptional, sustained and compassionate patient care. Ms. Barker is the nurse escort on the VA Bus that transports Veteran patients to and from the Milwaukee VA Medical Center twice a week for specialty care appointments.

She conscientiously and compassionately tends to he needs of the patients and their caregivers from the time they embark on the bus in the early morning to their return from Milwaukee later in the evening.

Women Putting Their Stamp on Metro Milwaukee

The Milwaukee VA Medical Center is blessed with a wide variety of talented, caring and hard working people.

Darcie Greuel and Sonia Dumit-Minkel

It is impossible to recognize everyone for their accomplishments, but one local program has given Milwaukee VA an opportunity to highlight some of their employees. The U.S. Postal Service has had a formal recognition program for the last 14 years, titled, "Women Putting Their Stamp on Metro Milwaukee."

The awards, in a variety of categories, recognize Milwaukee-area women for having made a positive impact on their community. The awards are presented each year in March to coincide with Women's History Month.

The Milwaukee VA Employees being recognized are: **Darcie Greuel**, a case manager from the OEF-OIF Outreach Team, in the Military category. Darcie has been in the Army Reserves for more than 27 years, was deployed to Afghanistan in 2003-2004, and is currently the commander of the 548th Minimal Care Detachment Unit based in Madison, WI.

Darcie's knowledge and experience with both the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs helps her tremendously with her dual role.

Darcie is also a parent, a volunteer with Reclaiming Our Heritage and was the emcee for the 2011 Memorial Day Ceremony in Wood National Cemetery.

Sonia Dumit-Minkel is the senior staff physical therapist in the category of Health and Social Services. Sonia specializes in rehabilitation medicine and has been a trailblazer in her field. She has been nationally published for her work in wound care studies. She was recognized with the Clinical Excellence Award in 2010 by the Wisconsin Physical Therapy Association and was the Employee of the Year for 2010. Sonia's work goes far beyond the walls of the Medical Center; she is a Board Member of WIcare Ambassadors, and a member of the World Union of Wound Healing Societies. I

n addition, one of her great passions is her involvement with the Milwaukee Medical Mission. Sonia is currently president of the board of directors for this group and they provide annual trips for surgical medical care for under-served areas of Central and South America.

Darcie and Sonia were both humbled by the recognition and quick to point out that they both serve Veterans with a team of employees that work just as hard as they do in providing the best possible healthcare to our nation's Veterans.

2012 National Salute To Veteran Patients

VA Medical Centers Across The Country Celebrate "Salute To Veteran Patients" Week

Thousands of Veterans in Chicago had a very special Valentine's Day, courtesy of Help Hospitalized Veterans and as a result of the hard work of staff at all three VISN 12 Chicago-area VA facilities. For the third year in a row, Chicago's own Chi-Lites, performed for an enthusiastic crowd of Veterans and their families. This year's concert was held at the UIC Forum and was part of a national VA partnership with Help Hospitalized Veterans to recognize Veterans for their service. Similar Valentines for Veterans concerts were put on in numerous cities across the country. The Chicago concert was put on as a joint effort by staff at Hines, Jesse Brown and Lovell FHCC.

Harry Porterfield, CBS-2 Anchorman, was the MC of the program, which began with short remarks by Michael Anaya, Jesse Brown Director, Patrick Sullivan, Lovell FHCC Director and Jennifer Gutowski, Acting Associate Director at Hines. After a few great warm-up acts, the crowd went wild when the Chi-Lites began performing.

Harry Porterfield, CBS-2 Anchorman, served as the MC for Chicago's Valentines for Veterans Concert, put on by staff from all three VISN 12 VA facilities

"This is the third year in a row that we have been able to bring the Chi-Lites to Chicago to perform for free for Veterans," said Barb Hunt, Chief of Voluntary Service at Hines. "The Veterans love this group and have been looking forward to this event since we announced it a few months ago." Hines, Jesse Brown and Lovell FHCC all transported Veterans to the concert via buses or vans.

"The enthusiasm of Chicago Veterans for this event was amazing to see," said Pat Gleason, Chief of Voluntary at Jesse Brown. "This concert is a great way to give something back to our Veterans in a really fun and entertaining environment. It was a lot of fun."

Chicago's own Chi-Lites performed for more than 1,000 enthusiastic Veterans and their families at the UIC Forum

David Buckwalter, a Vietnam Veteran who attended the concert wearing a tuxedo, agreed. "This concert gave me and my wife an excuse to dress up and go out on the town," he said. "The Chi-Lites are amazing and I can't tell you how much we appreciate the VA for putting on this concert."

The Valentines for Veterans concerts are designed to take the VA into the community, enhance publicity and ultimately further VA's goal of providing top-notch healthcare for Veterans.

Staff from all three Chicago VA facilities were on hand in the lobby of the concert to inform Veterans on VA program and benefits and even sign them up for health care. Attendees at the concert were also encouraged to visit hospitalized Veterans and consider becoming volunteers.

"The most important thing about this concert is that we use it as a tool to show our appreciation to the Veterans," said Jennifer Gutowski, Hines Acting Associate Director, in her remarks at the concert. "After all….they are why we are here."

At Hines VA Hospital

IL State Comptroller, Judy Baar Topinka (center), visits Veterans

Illinois State Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka visited Veterans at the Hines VA Hospital on Valentine's Day. She went throughout the hospital's Community Living Center, bringing special Valentines and a big smile to every Veteran that she met.

At Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

Representative Mike Quigley of Illinois' 5th Congressional District talks with Lynette Taylor (left), assistant director, and Michelle Blakely, associate director. Quigley visited inpatients in the hospital bed tower and attended the kickoff of National Salute to Veteran Patients Week. During the ceremony, he presented a proclamation recognizing the National Salute to Veteran Patients and honoring Jesse Brown VAMC and Hines VA Hospital for their service to Veterans in Chicago and northwest Indiana.

At Madison VA Hospital

The Madison VAH recognized this national celebration with a variety of events. A gift distribution was conducted and sponsored by the VAVS Committee; general visitations and distribution of valentines took place; and an Ice Cream Social for patients and their visitors was held. The Valentine Guessing Contest was held for inpatients with cash prizes totaling $100. A Valentine's Day dinner, coordinated by the American Red Cross, was held for the transplant patients and their caregivers, who are currently residing either in-house or at community hotels. A second ice cream social was held for patients and their visitors. Over 4,000 valentines were distributed to the Veterans, both inpatients and outpatients, this year.

Members of the Telephone Pioneers fill ice cream orders for delivery to the Veterans on the inpatient floors.

At Tomah VA Medical Center

The National Salute schedule included a variety of activities for Veterans such as a Valentine's Day Dance, Miss Wisconsin Raeanna Johnson visiting Veterans, the Cranberry Royalty serving Valentine's Day cake, and visiting ambassadors from the Tomah Area Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Wisconsin Raeanna Johnson visits Jody Krause who residents in the long term living center

The National Salute to Veteran Patients is a national program that encourages all Americans to visit and volunteer at VA medical centers and to send letters of thanks or Valentines to those who have served our nation.

"The National Salute to Veteran Patients gives people a chance to remind our nation's heroes of our appreciation for their service," said Tomah VA Acting Director David J. Houlihan, M.D. "We've invited the local communities to share in the celebration during this week."

Houlihan said that National Salute gives people a chance to learn up close about the roles volunteers play at the medical center during the year and discover some of the ways to make a difference for Veterans.

"Our volunteers are an important part of our team and the National Salute is a great way for people to see them in action and learn more about helping out Veterans," said Houlihan.

The pinnacle of the week is the Creative Arts Festival which showcased the art of the Tomah VA Veterans and was on display during the week. Entries included art forms such as sculptures, paintings, wood work, ceramics, and needle work. Veterans in the performing arts categories presented their music, dance, drama, and creative writing entries in the VA chapel. The winners from all the categories will move on with a chance to compete in the national competition.

The reigning Ms. Wisconsin, Raeanna Johnson, also visited the Tomah VA, meeting many of the Veterans and posing for photos with everyone who asked. After presenting the bowling competition awards, the La Crosse business and communications student toured Tomah VA, meeting many more Veterans.

Marine Corps Veteran Mike Graham works to create art from a block of wood on a lathe in a wood turning activity during National Salute week.

Identity Theft

MORE THAN A NUMBER | DEFEND VETERANS' IDENTITIES

Whether it's a Social Security number, date of birth, or address, every piece of personally identifiable information is more than just a number. It represents the identity, livelihood, and personal well-being of a Veteran, a colleague, and your own family and friends. This is why VA's Office of Identity Safety has launched the More Than a Number Campaign, which equips VA employees with tools for preventing identity theft. Use these resources to learn how you can avoid being a victim of this faceless crime and join VA in taking a stand against identity theft. Remember, you are the first and most important line of defense.

To download materials, view or listen to the presentations, visit the following website:
https://vaww.infoprotection.va.gov/rmir/id%20theft.aspx

Someone You Should Know

Tomah VA Medical Center Welcomes New Director

When **Mario V. DeSanctis** took the reins as the new director at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center on Feb. 13, his first week started like every other VA employee. The new director was among the 19 new employees at the Tomah VA's new employee orientation. While DeSanctis' first week started like every VA employee's first week, it ended in the director's office where his goals as the new director will begin to take shape in the months to come.

DeSanctis' main goal as director is to make the Tomah VA the first choice for Veterans. "When they think of excellence, quality and good access to health care, I want them to think of us first," said DeSanctis.

He will also focus on women's health, technology and a more efficient health care process. DeSanctis comes to the Tomah VA from Scott Air Force Base, IL, where he was the deputy group commander and hospital administrator for the 375th Medical Group, which administers health care to Airmen, their families and other beneficiaries.

DeSanctis retired from the Air Force in December at the rank of colonel after 30 years of service. He started his career in 1982 as a personnel specialist before going on to be commissioned and becoming a medical service corps officer.

DeSanctis said he looks forward to starting a new chapter in his life being able to serve the heroes who have served the United States, as well as the dedicated people who serve them. "The Tomah VA Medical Center has an excellent track record of providing Veterans with world-class health care," said DeSanctis. "I am humbled and honored to be a Veteran who is able to serve our Veterans in an outstanding facility."

Madison VA Medical Center Awaits Arrival of New Director

Judy K. McKee was appointed to become the next director of William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI. McKee, who is currently director of VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System, will begin her new assignment April 23. She succeeds Deborah A. Thompson, who retired as director of the Madison VA Hospital in February.

McKee became VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System director on Dec. 20, 2009, following her three-year assignment as associate director at Kansas City VAMC. Prior to that, she served for two and a half years at the Bob Stump VA Medical Center in Prescott, AZ.

McKee received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Nebraska Medical Center School of Nursing in 1980 and her Masters degree in Public Health from the University of Missouri–Columbia in 1988.

McKee's VA career includes working in a variety of nursing and clinical management roles. Prior to her appointment in 2004 as the associate director at the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System, she was the operations manager of the primary care service line at the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital in Columbia, MO.

She is an Executive Career Field graduate and a 2003 graduate of the VA Health Care Leadership Institute.

McKee is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives. She is a 2006 graduate of the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA) Leadership Development Program.

More Emergency Preparedness Tips!

Flood Safety-Turn Around, Don't Drown

Each year, more deaths occur due to flooding than from any other severe weather-related hazard.

Over half of all flood-related drowning's occur when a vehicle is driven into hazardous floodwater. The next highest percentage of flood-related deaths is due to walking into or near flood waters. Why? The main reason is people underestimate the force and power of water. Many of the deaths occur in automobiles as they are swept downstream. Of these drowning's, many are preventable, but too many people continue to drive around the barriers warning that the road is flooded.

Most flood-related deaths and injuries could be avoided if people who come upon areas covered with water followed this simple advice: **Turn Around, Don't Drown**. The reason that so many people drown during flooding is because few of them realize the incredible power of water. *A mere 6 inches of fast-moving floodwater can knock over an adult. It takes only 2 feet of rushing water to carry away most vehicles*. This includes pickups and SUVs.

If you come to an area covered with water, you will not know the depth of the water or the condition of the ground under the water. This is especially true at night, when your vision is more limited. Play it smart, play it safe. Whether driving or walking, any time you come to a flooded road, **Turn Around, Don't Drown**.

Family Communications During A Disaster

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another. Think about how you will communicate in different situations.

Complete a contact card for each adult family member. Have them keep these cards handy in a wallet, purse or briefcase, etc. Additionally, complete contact cards for each child in your family. Put the cards in their backpacks or book bags.

Check with your children's day care or school. Facilities designed for children should include identification planning as part of their emergency plans.

Family Communication Tips:

- Identify a contact such as a friend or relative who lives out-of-state for household members to notify they are safe. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
- Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has a cell phone, coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact. If you have a cell phone, program that person(s) as "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) in your phone. If you are in an accident, emergency personnel will often check your ICE listings in order to get a hold of someone you know. Make sure to tell your family and friends that you've listed them as emergency contacts.
- Teach family members how to use text messaging (also known as SMS). Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.
- Subscribe to alert services. Many communities now have systems that will send instant text alerts or e-mails to let you know about bad weather, road closings, local emergencies, etc. Sign up by visiting your local Office of Emergency Management website at: http://www.ready.gov/community-state-info.

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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