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Striving For a Seamless Transition From Service Member to Veteran Status

From left to right, Secretary of the VA Eric Shinseki, retired astronaut and Navy Capt. James A. Lovell, and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta pose for a photo during a visit to Lovell FHCC by Shinseki and Panetta to announce milestones in the development of the electronic health record.

With the nation's first federal health care center as a backdrop, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta joined Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki to announce milestones in the fielding of an electronic health care record that will follow military recruits from the day they enlist until the day they are buried with Veterans' honors.

Inside This Issue...

2 Network News

22 Awards and Recognition

23 Someone You Should Know

24 People Helping People

26 Note From the Editor

In a joint news conference May 21 at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, Panetta and Shinseki outlined the next steps in the initiative-introduced by President Obama in 2009-to share service members' health data between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our men and women in uniform serve this country by putting their lives on the line every day," Panetta said. "That's what they do; that's why we're proud of them, because they're willing to do that. Our duty is to make sure that we protect them by giving them the best healthcare we can."

The Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) features an Integrated Electronic Health Record, which is a single, jointly created common health record for all DoD and VA medical facilities that, when completed, will be the nation's single largest health record system.

The VLER initiative, aiming to eliminate gaps and expand information sharing between the two systems used by the VA and DoD is being pioneered at the Lovell FHCC. Officially established in October of 2010, the Lovell FHCC partners the VA and DoD to integrate all medical care into one facility to treat Veterans and active duty military personnel and their families.

"This center is the first of a kind, a partnership between our two departments," Panetta said. "This really is a unique demonstration of effort to try to bring together the DoD and VA systems. It brings all medical care together into a fully-integrated facility that serves recruits, service members, military dependents, retirees and Veterans. This facility is helping us chart the course for the future."

In 2014, initial capabilities of iEHR will be rolled out at two test sites: San Antonio, TX and Hampton Roads, VA, where DoD and VA provide medical care to thousands of service members and Veterans. Panetta and Shinseki also reaffirmed 2017 as a target date for iEHR to replace DoD's and VA's separate legacy electronic health records systems.

"When the last combatant comes home from Afghanistan, VA's requirements to care for those who have borne the battle will continue to grow for a decade or more after the end of the mission," Shinseki said. "We have the responsibility and the opportunity now to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans and to guarantee them a seamless transition from service member to Veteran status. This is key, this seamlessness."

The Lovell FHCC was named in honor of Apollo 13 astronaut, Illinois resident and retired Navy Capt. James A. Lovell, who was present at the press conference.

Lovell FHCC incorporates facilities and services from the former North Chicago VA Medical Center and Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes, and was established over three phases beginning in 2002. Six sections of federal law were created and incorporated within the National Defense Authorization Act to authorize the change, which culminated with a $130 million, 209,000 square foot addition to the former VA hospital, completed in 2009.

NETWORK NEWS

Hines

Bring Your Child To Work Day

The Hines Employer of Choice Committee sponsored its first Bring Your Child to Work Day this year. More than 50 children of Hines employees spent several hours at the hospital.

The enthusiastic group of children visited the hospital's Spinal Cord Injury Center, saw a demonstration by surgical personnel, and had fun learning about the Hines Police Department during their day on campus.

More than 50 children attended Hines' first Annual Bring Your Child to Work Day

"Events like this give children a better appreciation of the work their parents do at Hines to support our Veterans," said Cris Mabrito, Chair of the Hospital's Employer of Choice Committee. "It's also a great way to attract young, bright minds to Hines and the field of healthcare in general."

Based on the response to this year's Bring Your Child to Work Day, Hines looks forward planning another event next year.

Planting the Seeds of Hope

A new spring garden was recently planted at Hines by two very special groups of patients and their families. On Saturday, May 12th the Hospital's Addiction Therapy Program (ATP) Family Program and Support and Family Education (SAFE) Program participated in "Planting Seeds of Hope." Family members created a spring garden planting flowers and plants in the courtyard area behind Building 228.

Natalie and Mike Rudolph were enthusiastic participants in "Planting the Seeds of Hope"

"This activity focused on the importance of recreational activities as a way to promote self care, strengthen relationships, and create community," said Erin Mooney, Recreation Therapist. "It was also a lot of fun for all involved."

The Hines ATP Family Program is designed to assist family members in the education and recovery of being affected by a family member's addiction. The Family Program emphasizes the concepts of enabling, detachment, addiction in the family, medical aspects of addiction, addiction as a disease and community resources.

Also participating in planting the new garden, were the Hines SAFE Program, which supports friends and families of individual's with mental illness by providing education and opportunities for discussion about mental illness symptoms and mental illness in general. The group works to reduce stigma and understand the importance of early intervention as well as identify community and VA resources for support.

32nd Annual Hines Games

Approximately 90 Veterans of military conflicts ranging from World War II all the way through current Operations Enduring Freedom and Enduring Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn participated in the 32nd Annual Hines Veterans Hospital Veteran Games on a Saturday in May. Bowling, air rifles, blow darts, field events, and an obstacle course were among the featured events for both ambulatory and wheelchair participants.

The Games kicked off with a very special opening ceremony in front of Building 217, the Hospital's Community Living Center. Participating Veterans went through a processional that included a special salute by the local Knights of Columbus and a local boy scout troop was on hand to volunteer. Volunteers from the Westchester Army Recruiting Battalion, and the local Maywood and Broadview Fire Departments were present in uniform for the ceremony, which was kicked off by Michael Anaya, Acting Hines Director, as well as by representatives from the Heart of a Marine Foundation. There was a ceremonial lighting of the torch as well.

The local Knights of Columbus offered participants in the Annual Hines Veterans Games a very special entrance into this year's event

The Hines Games have a long history of therapeutic value to Veterans like longtime Hines patient Judi Ruiz. Competing for medals in air rifles, bowling or archery were not things that Ms. Ruiz ever thought she would be doing. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1974-1980, Ruiz led a very active life. Then, in the early 1990s she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and gradually became largely confined to a wheelchair. She was linked up with the Hines Recreation Therapy staff and became a regular participant in Veterans Games.

Every year, Ruiz practices for months for the Hines Games and she competed in the slalom, 200 meter race, air rifles, archery and bowling competitions this year. "Signing up to participate in the Veterans Games changed my life," said Ruiz, who has been involved in the VA's recreation therapy program for the past seven years. "I have learned to focus on my abilities, not my disabilities, and I am both physically and mentally stronger than I ever knew I could be."

2012 marks the 32nd year that the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital has sponsored the Hines Veterans Games. "We like to see a big turnout from the local community at the Veterans Games," said Lisa Wells, Chief Recreation Therapy Department. "It is truly inspiring to see what our Veteran athletes can accomplish and having an enthusiastic crowd on hand makes for an even more exciting day. It was great to have so many members of the Chicago community present this year."

Ruiz agrees. "I have made it my goal to pay it forward to other Veterans," she said. "When Veterans and their family members come out to see what the Games are all about, they are always impressed. The sense of community and fellowship between the Veterans is amazing."

A basketball toss was among the popular events at this year's Hines Veterans Games

Many of the participants at the Hines Veterans Games went on to compete in the VA's National Veterans Golden Age Games or the National Wheelchair Games in St. Louis. Hines sent a team of 17 athletes to the Golden Age Games this year.

All participants in the Hines Games received a participation medal, presented to them by Hines Chief of Staff, Dr. Jack Bulmash. "It was an honor to be a part of such a special day," said Dr. Bulmash.

Nurses Week 2012

Hines celebrated Nurses Week 2012 with five days of celebrations, professional development activities, affirmations and fun for the entire hospital. The Hospital kicked off a very busy week of activities by hosting a Nursing Town Hall with Cathy Rick, VA's Chief Nurse, serving as the keynote speaker.

Cathy Rick, VA's Chief Nurse, visited Hines and kicked off the hospital's Nurses Week celebration with a rousing speech at a Nursing Town Hall

Numerous Hines nurses were honored at the town hall and the Hines Associate Director for Patient Care Services, Carol Gouty, unveiled a new logo to signify the hospital's continued journey to magnet status. Patients expressed their satisfaction and gave a special thank you to our Hines nurses in a special video produced by the hospital's Media Service Department and shown at the opening kick-off event and on hospital electronic bulletin boards throughout the week.

Nursing leadership met Nurses at entrances to the hospital on Monday to personally thank them for their hard work and dedication. Every day for the remainder of the week, Hines' Nurses hosted special open houses on various units across the hospital and sponsored a variety of professional development seminars for nursing and non-nursing personnel alike. There was even a special link on the hospital's intranet where nurses posted their thanks to other nurses and to employees hospital-wide for their support to Nursing Service.

"This year, we made a conscious effort to include the entire hospital in our celebration of Nurses Week, said Gouty. "We are all on the same team and it is so important that we remember, we can't do it without one another. Nurses Week was a great time for us to celebrate our incredibly professional and dedicated nursing staff as well as the professional and dedicated Hines workforce in general."

Health Fair

Over 1200 Veterans and Hines employees attended the hospital's Second Annual Health Fair

Free health screenings, fitness and cooking demonstrations, and lots of fun were the order of the day at the second annual VA Health Fair for Veterans and employees in the hospital auditorium in late May.

This year's health fair slogan was *Keeping Hines Well and Well Informed*. The Health Fair was organized by the hospital's Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (HPDP) Committee. "Our health fair was a big success with over 1200 attendees," said Lorry Luscri, Hines HPDP coordinator. "We were thrilled to be able to offer Veterans and employees so many of the tools they need to live a healthy lifestyle. Overall, the response was incredible!"

The Fair featured booths and displays from different services and departments throughout Hines. More than 250 blood pressure checks were conducted, 150 participants received bone density scans and 70 Veterans received lab orders from Infectious Disease to get an HIV and Hepatitis C test. Stress tests and body fat measurements were also popular among the attendees at the Fair.

Hines dieticians offered general body fat readings and lots of great diet advice at the fair

"I learned a lot about all the different programs and things the VA has to offer at the Fair," said Mike Barbour, an area Army Veteran who attended the Fair. "I work with the city of Naperville so I plan to spread the word about all of these VA programs to my fellow Veterans. I'm very impressed."

There were a variety of fitness and cooking demonstrations at the Fair, including desk yoga, upper and lower body bands exercises, pole striding (Nordic Walking), and a special orientation to the new employee fitness center equipment at the hospital.

"It was great to see Veterans and employees so enthusiastic about all we have to offer here at Hines," said Luscri. "We are committed to educating everyone about the VA's Healthy Living Messages. This was a fun way to spread the word and promote all we have to offer here at Hines and at the VA in general."

Veterans Job Fair

More than 500 Veterans of eras from Vietnam through the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan attended a very special Veterans Job Fair

Hines partnered with the Illinois Department of Employment Security to bring local employers and veteran service organizations to the hospital's auditorium to serve as a one-stop-shop for Veterans who are looking for employment. Veterans with resumes in hand and dressed in sharp business suits lined up at Hines several hours before the event began to get a jump on the open jobs.

"I have been out of work since I got back from serving in Iraq two years ago," said David Schilling, an Army Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran. "Sometimes I don't think the employers appreciate what former military

can bring to their companies. That's why events like today are so important to those of us looking for work."

Approximately 30 employers with open positions attended the job fair. Hines Human Resources staff were on-hand to assist Veterans in applying for open positions at the hospital. In addition, more than 15 Veterans signed up to enroll in VA healthcare at the event. Numerous colleges and universities were also present to assist Veterans in signing up for educational benefits.

"God bless Hines VA for having this fair today," said Brandon Gray, a Vietnam Veteran and truck driver who has been looking for work for more than a year. "I spoke with a company today that is hiring truck drivers and I feel very hopeful based on my experience, I am perfect for one of their jobs. It was great to meet with reps from these companies in person. I just want a chance to work."

VA2K Fun

What a day for a 2K!

Hundreds of Hines employees took a break from their busy work schedules to participate in the second annual VA2K Walk and Roll. VA2K Walks were held at facilities around the country, including many of our Hines Community Based Outpatient Clinics. At the hospital, staff from the Blind Center (pictured above) brought an enthusiastic group of Veterans out to participate in the Walk.

There was music, giveaways, snacks and lots of good cheer as employees walked to raise awareness of our commitment to end homelessness among Veterans and promote wellness and physical activity among our employees.

Special Visitors

Mother and ducklings taking a stroll

For a third year in a row, a mother Mallard Duck visited the Hines Spinal Cord Injury Center Courtyard to give birth to her ducklings. The Duck gave birth to 10 ducklings in the SCI Courtyard. Hines employees and Veterans were thrilled to meet the ducks and took good care of them until they were picked up by the Chicago Bird Collision Monitors, a rescue group that works in conjunction with the Chicago Audubon Society. The ducks were released at a nearby Forest Preserve.

American English, a renowned Beatles Tribute Band, gave a rousing performance when they visited the hospital's Community Living Center (CLC). Veterans in the hospital's CLC were thrilled to hear their impressive show

Hines inpatients like Calvin Cheers on right were thrilled when Miss Illinois, Hannah Smith, took an afternoon to stop by and visit. "She made my day!" said Mr. Cheers

Iron Mountain

Welcome Home for the 1430th

The Michigan Army National Guard's 1430th Engineering Company, based in Marquette and Gladstone, Michigan, recently returned from Afghanistan last November.

In order to enhance delivery of health care to these soldiers, the medical center provided medical appointments on their drill weekend to establish care within the VA health care system.

"There was a whole company of soldiers returning from combat, and we were trying to figure out how to keep our Marquette VA Clinic, which is one of our busiest clinics, from being overwhelmed with all these new evals," said Kathy Truax, OEF/OIF/OND Program Coordinator.

The creative answer was to open some of the primary clinics as well as provide lab, imaging and audiology on the weekend to efficiently examine and process these soldiers, of which half came on Saturday and half on Sunday.

Sharon Lies (left) and Cheryl Bouche (right) check in soldiers for their initial VA medical appointments

"This alleviated the soldiers from having to take time off from work or school to make it to a VA medical appointment," said Truax.

Additionally, the soldiers attended a VA Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP) session as part of their scheduled visit.

"Of course, when they all come at once, we had to make sure we organized them in groups and scheduled them accordingly, assigning them escorts, to ensure we did not have bottlenecks in the system," said Truax.

Held in conjunction with the medical appointments was the hospital's annual Welcome Home Event, which was open to all Veterans and their families on both days. The event featured information booths with medical center staff, Veteran Service Officers, the VA Vet Center and other reps on hand to discuss VA health care and other benefits, such as VA home loans, education benefits and federal employment opportunities.

Free pizza and a live band were part of the event, which attracted Veterans families from WWII era to those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mary Gagala serves free breakfast to the soldiers of the 1430th Engineering Company

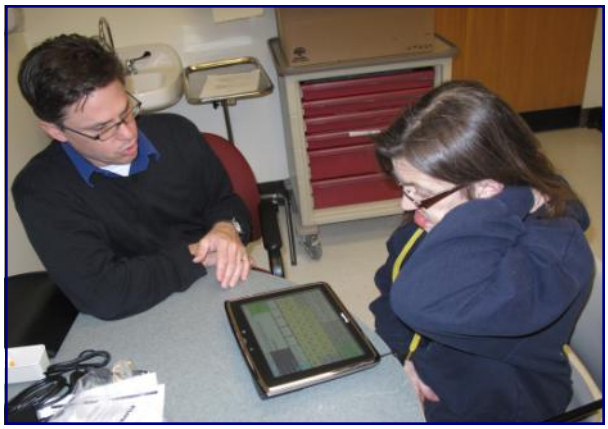
"We are thankful to all the hospital's employees from the medical and administrative services as well as medical center leadership who volunteered to make this weekend happen," said Truax.

Providing Alternative Communication Tools to Veterans

Iron Mountain VA conducted its first specialty clinic that focused on alternative augmentative communication. Two Veterans were assessed, fitted and provided with high-tech speech generating communication devices that allow them to verbally communicate clearly to others despite their inability to speak.

"These devices not only allow individuals to communicate face-to-face with family, caregivers and others," said Jim Zeigler, Chief of Rehabilitation

Service, "they can feature technologies enabling the Veteran to answer the phone; access the internet; and turn on and off lights, televisions, and computers."



Joel Allchin (left) of Dynavox Mayer-Johnson shows Veteran Sandra Borden (right) how to use her new speech generating communication device to aid her in communicating with others

People's ability to communicate their wants and needs as well as social and occupational messages can be limited by various disease processes. Veteran Carl Uhlbeck has Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, which is one of the neurological conditions or diseases that impair communication and swallowing abilities.

"These diseases progress in a rapid fashion or have a sudden onset, such as stroke or traumatic brain injury, which drastically changes a person's ability to speak," said Zeigler.

The VA speech-pathology and prosthetics programs work in unison to assess, provide, and maintain computerized high-tech devices that are designed to capitalize upon each Veteran's individual ability level and to plan for the future disease progression. Devices that feature the use of touch initially are appropriate. However, as the individual's muscular strength and coordination are reduced, technological innovations, such as head mouse and eye gaze, are applied to trigger a human-sounding voice by running a mouse over a picture, word or phrase on the device. Methods such as eye blinking or holding a cursor for a prescribed duration over a chosen message icon add to the flexibility and quality of life.

During his appointment, Uhlbeck was fitted with a communications device that uses a head mouse placed on his forehead and directed by moving his head.

Veteran Sandra Borden contracted viral Encephalitis while in the Navy, which severely impacted her ability to speak. When asked how communicating would be easier now, she replied through her new device, "You can put in routine phrases and only need to press once."

"Pre-stored phrases and messages are particularly good for phone conversations," said Zeigler.

The devices Borden and Uhlbeck are using also have a core vocabulary already preprogrammed with word predictor capability. As the user begins to type a word, a list of words pop up, and the correct word can be selected without typing any further.

"One of the nice things is that it is faster," said Borden.

"Speech-Language Pathologists are uniquely trained to assess and treat these communicative disorders," said Zeigler. "We are working on getting the word out to Veterans of these advances in technology, so that their quality of life will improve."

Peer Support Groups Effective in Helping Veterans

"Shell shocked," "battle or combat fatigue," and "PTSD" are some of the evolving terms for the impact that war has had on troops throughout the last 100 years.

Much is made in the press and in health care circles recently of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting from 10 plus years of combat operations. In reality, war has always impacted the mental health of soldiers and sailors. However, mental health professionals are much more knowledgeable of PTSD, and other mental health disorders, and treatments for those disorders are more varied and effective.

One of the effective treatments used today by the VA in its mental health recovery program is peer support recovery groups, and the VA's Community Outpatient Clinic in Rhinelander, Wisconsin is leading the way. "The peer support groups provide opportunities for the Veterans to take control of their own recovery," said Tim Bahr, a certified peer support specialist at the Rhinelander VA Clinic. Bahr is a long-serving Marine Corp Veteran who is recovering from PTSD himself and is currently running eight peer support groups at the clinic.

Marine Corp Veteran Tim Bahr (left) is the VA Rhinelander Clinic's peer support specialist. He has deployed to hotspots around the world, including Iraq

"These groups teach and support the learning of skills needed to facilitate one's recovery as well as help the Veteran develop a sense of wellness and self-worth," he added.

Two of the peer groups are for spouses. "I was asked by the spouses of our group participants if they could have a one-time group so they could understand what was happening to their spouses," said Bahr. "This one-time group turned into a weekly spouses group, and now we have two spouses' peer groups going," he added.

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact peer support makes to the recovery of people dealing with mental health conditions. Peer support groups have improved social functioning and quality of life for Veterans while reducing hospitalizations and use of crisis services.

"One Vietnam combat Vet had isolated himself from pretty much everyone since returning from the war," said Bahr. "He wanted little, if any, interaction with others."

"After being fired from his long time job, and with the insistence of his wife, the Veteran joined one of the clinic's peer led, peer support recovery groups, and today he is getting out and socializing with members of the group," Bahr added.

This Veteran is just one example of many Veterans who have expressed the empowerment they feel by having the opportunity to participate in peer support groups.

"It is not uncommon for participants in peer support groups to say that they are glad the group is being led by someone who knows where they have been or understand where they are coming from," said Bahr.

Peer support groups and evidenced-based therapies are both part of the VA's mental health recovery model. "Mental health recovery is about the Veteran finding his or her way in the world – the way that works best for them so they can live the best life possible," said Karen Krebsbach, Recovery Coordinator.

"Recovery groups change the emphasis from 'What is wrong with you' to 'what is right with you,'" said Krebsbach.

Students Learn About VA Career

The facility hosted approximately 140 juniors from the Kingsford High School over two-days, May 21-22, for a tour of the medical center and first-hand look at VA careers.

"Being located in a rural area makes it difficult to recruit various specialty professions," said MaryAnne Gibler, EEO Program Manager, "so our Workforce Development and EEO Diversity Committees are dedicated to reaching out to our community to tap into local talent."

Over 50 VA staff participated in showing students just what they do and what type of education was needed to accomplish their goals. After a facility tour, students attended two (of the seven) "career booths" of their choice, where they learned about two to three careers at each booth.

Students were exposed to a variety of professions ranging from social work, nursing, physician, and rehabilitation medicine to finance, human resources, informational technology and health care management. In all, 20 careers were highlighted.

Kingsford junior Rhiannou Meeuwsen checks the airway of a fully computerized patient mannequin as other students and VA Nurses providing career information look on

In many of the sessions, students participated in hands-on demonstrations such as checking airways of a fully computerized patient mannequin and performing laparoscopic surgery using a training

device. Students interested in engineering careers were given a tour of the various shops and professions that keep the medical center fully functioning.

“The passionate dedication of the VA employees we met on Monday and Tuesday is obvious,” said Kendalynn Sutton, an English teacher at Kingsford High School. “They served to illustrate to our students how hard work, goal setting and passion lead to career success.”

“This was powerful!” added Nancy Jayne, guidance counselor at Kingsford.

Prior to the career fair days, Gibler and Chad Bianchi, a local intern, conducted a presentation on “Jobs vs. Careers” to the students.

“The Kingsford High School Flivver Foundation Class worked with us to assist the junior class in looking to the future,” said Gibler, who has presented VA careers and taught job seeking skills at various local schools.

Jesse Brown

Veterans Attend Resources, Services Fair

Magylyn Buduan (left) and Marlene Hudson were on hand to assist during the Veterans Resources and Information Fair

More than 600 Veterans attended the resources and services fair on May 15. VA staff held the fair in collaboration with 52 partner agencies representing federal, state and local organizations serving Veterans. Information booths included VA health care, employment assistance, housing and homeless programs, legal assistance, and education benefits.

Unveiling The ‘Wall of Honor’

Veterans and visitors were welcomed by the hospital's new "Wall of Honor" Memorial Day weekend.

The wall includes the official seals of the five military branches – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard – each custom-made and nearly four feet in diameter. Above the seals reads, "Honored to serve...those who served."

The ‘Wall of Honor’ welcomes Veterans and visitors to the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

"I think it's a terrific way to honor Veterans and act as a reminder that the VA is here for those that have served," said Joe Bazil, Assistant Chief of Environmental Management Service. "What a great way to have it installed over Memorial Day weekend." Construction and installation of the seals were paid for by the medical center's commitment to recycling.

Each month the medical center receives refund checks for cardboard, food grease, paper products and other materials that are collected and redeemed at a local recycler. The money is deposited into a recycling fund which was used to pay for the project.

Jesse Brown VAMC is a recipient of the 2011 Practice Greenhealth Partner Recognition Award for efforts to make the medical center more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Madison

Former POWs Honored

Seventy years ago in early April, 75,000 U.S. and Filipino troops were fighting against overwhelming odds in the final days of the Battle of Bataan in the Philippines. When they were forced to surrender April 9, 1942, the 12,000 U.S. and 63,000 Filipino soldiers were the largest U.S. force ever captured at a single time. The prisoners taken that day went on to endure

the unimaginable cruelty of the Bataan Death March, Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan, Hell Ships, and forced labor on the Japanese home islands. Many thousand died along the way.

Each year on the Friday closest to April 9, William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital hosts a ceremony to mark National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day and to honor all of our nation's former POWs, including those from southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois who have received health care from the Madison VA Hospital.

Retired Army Col. Stephen Leopold speaks at the annual POW Recognition Ceremony. Leopold, then a 2nd lieutenant, was captured in South Vietnam on May 9, 1968, and held in captivity for nearly five years

The 2012 ceremony for National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day was held April 6. The keynote speaker was retired U.S. Army Col. Stephen Leopold, Milwaukee, who was held captive in Cambodia and North Vietnam for four years, 10 months and 23 days—and still serves today as a volunteer driver for the DAV transportation program at Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee.

Also participating was Wisconsin Secretary of Veterans Affairs John Scocos, who read a proclamation from Gov. Scott Walker recognizing the event.

Among the U.S. forces on Bataan in early 1942 were 99 soldiers of the Wisconsin National Guard's Janesville-based Company A, 192nd Tank Battalion, who arrived on Thanksgiving day—less than three weeks before Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor Dec. 7 and the Philippines Dec. 8. Two Janesville soldiers were killed in combat, one died on the Death March, 15 were lost when their prison transport ship was torpedoed, and many more died during more than three years of brutal captivity. Few U.S. cities of Janesville's size lost as many men from a single unit, and only 35 of the "Janesville 99" survived the war.

Most of the survivors who returned to Wisconsin received health care at the Madison VA Hospital. The last survivor died in Janesville Oct. 7, 2009.

Restaurant-Style Meal Service

Cherie Hausenfleck, on the left, serves lunch to Veteran, Jerry Bartow

The Nutrition and Food Service have begun serving meals "restaurant-style" at the noon mealtime in the Community Living Center (CLC). The idea behind the restaurant-style meals in the dining area is to emphasize the healing aspects that enjoying a good meal and companionship provide. Rather than receiving a tray with their food already plated, with the restaurant-style meals, the CLC resident's food is plated in front of them in the dining room which creates a more home-like atmosphere. The beautiful new dining atmosphere provides encouragement for the residents to share conversation during their mealtimes and promotes a different level of engagement between the residents, their peers, the volunteers and the staff providing their care. This approach is one example of providing more patient-centered care which places the individual along with their needs and preferences at the center of the care provided.

Epilepsy Inpatient Art Project

In recognition of Purple Day, an international grassroots effort dedicated to increasing epilepsy awareness worldwide, the staff and volunteers of the Madison VA Hospital's Epilepsy Center of Excellence (ECoE) hosted an art display. The art projects on display are part of the Epilepsy Inpatient Art Project and were created by Veterans who are enrolled in the epilepsy treatment program.

Hilary Rohrer and Rhonda Tschumper are shown with the Epilepsy Art Cart along with a variety of the completed art projects

The Epilepsy Inpatient Art Project was initiated on February 9, 2011, as a combined effort between the ECoE and Community Relations. The art cart, which contains plain Styrofoam heads and an ample supply of art materials, is brought into the epilepsy inpatient rooms every week by, Rose Wenger, hospital volunteer, and one of the ECoE staff, who assist the epilepsy inpatients with the act of expressing and decorating a Styrofoam head. The purpose of this activity is for the Veteran to illustrate or visualize what it is like to experience seizures and what it means to live with epilepsy. The decorated Styrofoam heads are collected after each epilepsy inpatient stay to be displayed in the hospital during National Epilepsy Awareness Month, which is every November. The hope is that the epilepsy inpatient art project will have the ability to bridge the epileptic experience with artistic expression to create understanding and awareness of the effects of epilepsy.

Dog on Call Pet Partners

The Hospital had its first inpatient visit by friends from Dog on Call (DOC) this past fall, on the mental health inpatient unit. Since this successful first visit, the Dogs on Call program has grown and recently expanded to include visits on the newly-opened Community Living Center (CLC).

Veteran, Tom Raycheck (right) enjoys his first visit with pet partners and volunteers, Karen and Zombie Smith

Every week, one of the DOC teams visits the Veterans in the CLC. These visits have become one of the favorite activities of the CLC's residents. Veteran Tom Raycheck has enjoyed the visits immensely, and remembers every dog that has come to visit including Tootsie, the chocolate lab, and Teddy, the golden doodle. Visits also continue on the mental health inpatient unit on a bi-weekly basis.

The Madison VA Hospital has partnered with local pet partner group, Dogs on Call. The only pet partners that can be enrolled as volunteers for animal-assisted visits at the Madison VA must be members of Dogs on Call and be current on all the DOC policies. There are currently ten registered volunteer Pet Partner teams that provide animal-assisted visits.

"Clothesline" Raises Awareness of Sexual Violence

The VA Hospital hosted its first "Clothesline Project" (a worldwide program based in Massachusetts) to raise awareness of sexual violence—specifically military sexual trauma (MST).

During the first two weeks of May, survivors of sexual assault and their allies were invited to decorate T-shirts with meaningful imagery and text to "break the silence" about sexual violence.

Participants in the "Clothesline Project" hand-painted T-shirts with awareness messages about sexual violence and MST

On May 15, the T-shirts were hung side-by-side on clotheslines near the hospital's main entrance so Veterans and staff members could bear witness to the impact of sexual assault and MST. Visitors spent time viewing the display, shared their own stories, and enjoyed T-shirt shaped cookies baked by Veterans. Some decorated their own T-shirts to speak out against sexual assault, and Veterans recorded their responses to the display in a visitor's book.

Information, a visitors book and cookies shaped like T-shirts were all part of the materials provided for the hospital's "Clothesline Project"

The Clothesline Project was a collaborative team effort between the Wellness Program and MST coordinator Susan Knoedel. Wellness Program team participants were Sheryll Faivre, Tricia Medow, Brooke Morgan, Russell Soehner and Kristin Muckian.

Art therapy intern Stacy Sullivan coordinated the project.

Milwaukee

Reclaiming Our Heritage and Welcome Home Celebrations

The Iraq and Afghanistan outreach team at the Milwaukee VA partnered with Reclaiming Our Heritage this year with a special "Welcome Home" tent for those Veterans.

Reclaiming Our Heritage, a two-day military encampment with military re-enactors, parade, displays, food vendors and more took place June 2 and 3 on the Milwaukee VA campus.

Though current military units have marched in the parade at the annual military encampment, this is the first time it will feature displays, stories and photos from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Spec. Patrick Aukofer describes his photos and experiences while deployed to Iraq. It was his idea to have a special tent dedicated to Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

Laura Rinaldi, one of the main organizer's of the event, said there were already plans to include a display area for the current conflicts, so it was a perfect fit when the VA asked to partner for the "Welcome Home" event.

The Iraq and Afghanistan outreach team has held different events each of the last five years for official "Welcome Home" events to tell Veterans about VA benefits and encourage people to sign up for healthcare.

"It's a perfect fit because that is what we are all about," Rinaldi said.

There was one main welcome tent area for all visitors, and a separate one for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and their family members with a separate hospitality area for them to relax and some games for children. In addition, Friends of Reclaiming Our Heritage provided lunch for every Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran and immediate family member. There were trinkets and other handouts for family members, as well as games for children.

Every Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran received the book, "Tears of a Warrior: A Family's Story of Combat and Living with PTSD." Outreach team members, many who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, were on hand to talk with visitors and all Veterans, and help process any paperwork if someone wished to sign up for VA healthcare and other benefits.

"This is just one way where we can integrate the larger (Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran) population with the overall Veteran population," said Delon Powell, an Iraq Veteran and member of the outreach team. "In some cases, those older Veterans will be able to provide information and insider tips that will help them, and help them on the path to recovery if they need it.

"Our healthcare and outreach has gotten so much better since Vietnam, but younger Veterans might hear some of those stories, or not get correct information from their own units," Powell added. "We just want them to come out, check things out and make their own decisions. If they don't want to sign up for healthcare, that's fine. No one is going to force them. If they want to check it out, and still go elsewhere, that's fine, too. We'd like people to see what we offer."

Fellow Veteran Mindy Mingerink, who also served in Iraq and works at the Milwaukee VA, said when Veterans of different eras meet up, they can share similarities and differences of going to combat.

"Some things never change, and some things are a lot different now than they were in Vietnam or other wars, but a lot of the experiences are the same," she said. "One good thing about having those of us there who have been (in the recent conflicts) is we understand what people went through. They don't have to take the time to explain things. They aren't talking to someone who hasn't been over there and doesn't understand."

Rinaldi said that's why this was a perfect fit for Reclaiming Our Heritage.

Patient Recognition Awards Reception

There was a presentation and luncheon to honor Veterans who receive their healthcare from the VA. They were recognized for their successful efforts in developing healthier ways to live. Their struggles could have been gaining too much weight, substance abuse, injury, onset of an illness or disease. It didn't matter what the barrier was, these Veterans are finding ways to make their lives, and the lives of Veterans around them, healthier and happier.

Nancy Wilke is an Occupational Therapist and she nominated multiple Veterans for recognition. "It is so rewarding to see Veterans whom you have worked with get acknowledged for their hard work in making positive changes with their health. These Veterans truly understand that each one of us holds the key to our health, and it is the choices we make that effects our health and quality of life. These Veterans are excellent role models."

The individual stories were moving, such as one Veteran who had a stroke. It left him with Locked-In Syndrome in which he could only communicate through movement of his eyes for several weeks. In rehabilitation, this Veteran is re-learning how to eat, speak, walk, bathe and transfer himself out of a power wheelchair. Throughout it all he is always asking how he can help other Veterans, in his words to "pay it forward."

Another Veteran made rapid changes in her life in a short time. She had to figure out how to exercise more and break unhealthy eating habits, all the while being a student, employee and a grandma. Bit by bit she dropped 50 pounds and managed to get her diabetes under better control. She can now chase her grandson and this strong work ethic has carried over into landing a new job, too.

Master of ceremonies Dale Christianson, Primary Care's Lead Social Worker, said it was a great day to spotlight the hard work put forth by patients. "It is humbling to participate in the Patient Recognition Awards Reception and witness the significant strides these Veterans have made to improve their health. On a daily basis VA medical center staff are working with Veterans in many different areas to make a difference. Recognizing the progress so many Veterans have made is heartwarming. Perseverance and motivation are evident in all of the stories of these Veterans. We are grateful for their service as Veterans and we appreciate their choice to seize control of their lives and make healthy choices."

Employees Learning New and Different Leadership Skills

Lt. Gary Hart learned supervision the old-fashioned way – through 22 years in the military, and then time on the police force with the L.A. County Sheriff's Office and now at the Milwaukee VA.

Over the last nine months he got some refreshers and learned some new tricks for the supervision bag through the VA's Leadership Development Program.

He was one of 24 employees who met once a month to develop new and different leadership skills. He and the rest of the class graduated Friday, May 11, and celebrated with a lunch at Lake Wheeler.

"It helped teach me that supervision is more than numbers and you need to treat your people as your most important resource," he said. "I learned some of this in the military, but in that environment you sometimes tell people 'Do this because I said so.' This class helps demilitarize you. It helps you to tell your troops, 'I need you to do this and this is why.' By using these techniques, it helps you apply the needs of my troops against the needs of the mission.

"It was exceptional and very motivational," he added. "It's insightful because it makes you look at yourself and your own work ethic."

The leadership course, now in its 11th year, runs from September through May and is led by Dr. Mike Erdmann, the chief of staff, and Shannon Siehr, the administrative assistant to the chief of staff. It's open to most employees looking to improve their leadership skills or move into positions with greater responsibility.

Much of it is based on Steven Covey's book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," and it's designed to help employees better understand the VA's High Performance Development Plan.

"The VA is very good in providing leadership and training opportunities and this is one more way where we try to help people grow into bigger roles," Siehr said. "There is some reading, but the biggest benefits are in the group exercises, the personal development plans that each student creates and the coaches who partner with them in small groups.

"It's always fulfilling to watch graduates grow and learn about themselves as the course goes on," she said. "Many of them come back and say it helped

them to better understand themselves, their personal lives and define what is important to them. It's something that can be used not only on the job communicating, but communicating and interacting with your own family."

Additional objectives of the program include:

- Promoting inter-professional cooperation and collaboration;
- Identifying ways to create balance, manage time, and reduce stress while accomplishing more;
- Developing opportunities to practice new learned leadership skills;
- Increasing understanding of the necessity of good "soft skills" in high-performing leaders, including the development of storytelling abilities;
- Developing basic understanding of the core business acumen needed to be successful with the VA.

But beyond the high-brow language, it simply makes good people better, said Amanda Urrea, Medical Media photographer.

"In my job I work with a lot of different people on projects, and I saw a lot of the high-quality people I interacted with were the go-to people for their organization, and they had been through the course.

"I think one benefit is you meet other people and that will help you network, but even if you think you are a good leader, this class helps you improve on things you are already doing well. It opens your eyes to new ideas and pushes you to do even better. I think I'm a more patient person now, and able to work with people better because of this."

Siehr said leaders initially thought interest might die down, but after 11 years, the class is still going strong and they have to sometimes turn people away because the class size is limited.

Stirring Up Nutritious Success

Milwaukee Dietitians (R.D.'s) ran with the opportunity to create a healthier environment at the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center during National Nutrition Month. As soon as the 2012 theme "Shape Up Your Plate" was announced by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a team of Milwaukee RD's began feverishly listing the events they wanted to share with Veteran's, family members, and VA employees.

"The month was a huge success," says Jean Wroblewski, Program Manager of Nutrition and Food Services. Numerous hours were devoted towards activities that would reach a large audience within the medical center. The month started off with an interactive 'Lunch and Learn' to discuss healthy eating for busy lifestyles. The Lunch and Learn provided food samples and food demonstrations for Veterans and VA employees.

VA nutrition professionals were recognized the following week on Registered Dietitian/Dietetic Technician Day with a celebratory lunch. The meal consisted of a plethora of healthy foods to celebrate the RD's/DTR's themselves: tilapia tacos with cabbage slaw and fresh lime juice, fresh quinoa salad, and chocolate oat squares for dessert.

Touting the 2nd Annual Nutrition Fair as their nutrition grand slam event of the month, the dietitians focused their expertise on the "Shape Up Your Plate" theme. Employees, Veterans, and families learned how to use the "plate method" to create 'My Healthy Breakfast,' 'My Healthy Lunch,' and 'My Healthy Dinner' options. Chef Paul Brinkman showed off his culinary expertise with a healthy food demonstration of pasta accompanied with stir-fried vegetables, lean turkey breast, and a low-fat alfredo sauce. Attendees were wowed with food samples, demonstrations, and medical & nutritional experts.

To finish the month with a bang, RD's asked Veterans Canteen Service to provide three healthy entrees available to all Veterans, patrons, and employees as menu items available for purchase. Healthy meals included Turkey Tacos with fresh cilantro, tomato, and avocado, Black Bean Turkey Burritos, and Chicken Stir-fry. On this day, Food Service Workers and Food Service Supervisors threw RD's & DTR's a "Thank you Reception" complete with muffins, yogurt, vegetables, and fruit.

"Everyone did an awesome job getting the healthy plate initiative across. Our dietitians and dietetic technicians really brought the concept to the forefront to patients and staff," stated Wroblewski.

CPR Training Comes In Handy

Sheri Gilson and Catherine Giannese have been friends a long time and do a lot of things together. They went to school together, and both have been working here as radiology technicians for about seven years. They hang out together, and they go on break together. And on Monday, they saved a baby's life together.

Gilson and Giannese were outside the Milwaukee VA's South Entrance Monday morning, when a man who lived in the house across the street came outside screaming. "At first we thought, 'It's getting to be summer. People are going to be loud.' Then he ran back in the house and came out carrying a baby," Gilson said. "That's when we heard him yell, 'Help me! Lord Jesus, help me!'" Giannese said. "We just heard that and flew across the street."

Giannese already had a 911 operator on her cell phone as her friend helped the two navigate through traffic. "We got to the man and the baby was just dangling there, not breathing, and it looked like his eyes were rolling back in his head. The man said he had been in the crib and he just found him." That's when the CPR lessons they are required to take every two years came into play for Gilson.

"I turned the baby over and whacked his back, I don't know how many times. I'm thinking, 'Dear God, this baby cannot die in my arms.' All of a sudden, he just took a gasp of breath."

The two usually take their break together about 10 a.m. each day, but on this day, they were both tied up at work and a little busy. They didn't get outside until about 10:30. Had they been outside at the usual time, the outcome may have been tragic.

Gilson and Giannese waited for the ambulance to arrive and tried to reassure the worried dad. Both said they were grateful to know what to do.

Sheri Gilson, left, and Catherine Giannese, radiology technicians were on break when they heard a man screaming across the street. Their quick actions saved a baby's life

"We sit through the (CPR) class, and when it gets to the part about babies, I always think, 'There are no babies here at the VA. Why do we need to know this?'" Gilson said. "Now I'm glad to have the training. Everybody should have this CPR training and know what to do."

Giannese added: "My baby is six months old, and it's made me realize the importance of people knowing how to save my own baby. The main thing is, we didn't do this for glory. We did it because it was the right thing to do. If my baby was hurt, I would want people to help me. I'm glad we could do it." Once the situation calmed down, they called their boss, Peggy Gronowski, to let her know why they were a little late getting back from break.

"I was kind of flabbergasted to hear the news," Gronowski said. "It just put tears in my eyes. I'm pretty proud of those girls, but it doesn't surprise me. Everyone in this group has been a go-getter. If they see someone in need, or someone in distress, they do what needs to be done."

Renewal of Wedding Vows

It was 65 years ago when Del Petersen and his wife, Lorraine, said "I do." Then they did it again May 17 just to let people know they're still in love and committed to making this thing work.

Del, a World War II Army Veteran, has been a resident of the Milwaukee VA for five years. He and Lorraine renewed their wedding vows in the CLC dining room in front of their family: daughter, Annette Protiva and her husband, John; their grandson, Ryan, and his girlfriend, Brenna; John's mother, Delores; and Del's younger brother, Cliff. Patients, friends and staff filled up the crowd for the Catholic ceremony officiated by the Rev. Norm Oswald, the Milwaukee VA's chief chaplain. "Del and Lorraine are such a beautiful couple and it's such an honor to do this for them," he said.

Since it seems like this union is going to work out, the groom and bride were quick to offer some advice to others.

"Like any marriage, you have ups and downs, but there have been a lot of good times when you work at it," said Del, as he reached over and kissed Lorraine's hand. "There's give and take, but she's the boss."

Not so, says Lorraine. "I say he's the boss, and I'm just bossy," she chuckled.

Whatever the secret, it's safe to say this marriage is going to go the long haul. "We've just wanted to do this for a long time," she said. "We're strong Catholics and wanted Father Norm to do this for us."

"See?" Del said. "She just told me what to do, and I said, 'OK!'"

The banter might actually be part of their secret to staying married. "I would say watching them through the years, it was constant communication," said their son-in-law, John.

Del fought in the infantry for three years in some of the fiercest battles across Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge. "I didn't join the Army! They drafted me!" he said. "Was never injured over there, but I did freeze my feet. It was cold! Sometimes I wished I was shot. My feet give me trouble to this day."

He didn't meet Lorraine until he came home and got in a car accident that left him with a broken hip and pelvis, and was stuck in a hospital bed in traction.

"I'm a nurse," she said. "I'm an RN, and he couldn't go anywhere," she smiled. "He was very popular with the student nurses, but I got him."

They married a year later.

"I didn't think it would last this long, because I didn't think we'd still be here," Lorraine said.

But they have no complaints about the VA.

"They treat me really good here," Del said. "If it wasn't for the VA, I wouldn't be alive."

It's pretty safe to say at this point that divorce isn't an option for Del and Lorraine.

"The problem with some people who get married today is they don't stay to work through the bad stuff," Lorraine said. "There's got to be something there to begin with, and you don't give up. You stick together, and you work it out."

And after they said, "I do" one more time May 17, the two sealed their union – one more time – with a kiss.

Del Petersen kisses his bride after renewing their wedding vows on their 65th wedding anniversary

North Chicago

Doing What Needed To Be Done

Navy Lt. Cmdr. James Gennari estimates he had less than two minutes to make the decision that could have killed him.

And it wasn't hard, he said. On January 12 of this year, Gennari was the senior trauma nurse at a remote medical station in Afghanistan. The Marine on the gurney needed lifesaving medical treatment – and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD). Cpl. Winder Perez had a live rocket-propelled grenade, (RPG) lodged inside his body.

"Yes, I thought this thing could blow up, and I thought, 'if it does, it won't be because of anything I did,'" said Gennari, an active duty nurse at Lovell Federal Health Care Center. "I knew someone had to be there and stay calm. I couldn't lead from the rear. I had junior staff; I couldn't ask them to do anything I wouldn't do myself. I thought I needed to mitigate the vulnerability," he said.

EOD Technician Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Summerfield offered Gennari the chance to walk away before anyone touched the RPG.

"I told him, 'If you aren't leaving, I'm not leaving,'" said Gennari, who is married and the father of a 5-year-old daughter. "I knew the thing was either going to blow up or not. That was up to God."

In this screen shot from footage provided to Lovell FHCC, Navy Lt. Cmdr. James Gennari, right, provides medical care while Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Summerfield removes a live round from a Marine's leg

Perez wouldn't have made it without nursing care. Someone had to give him pain medication and conscious sedation, so the approximately 14-inch long RPG lodged in the upper part of his leg could be removed. Gennari kept the Marine's airway open and said a prayer for all three of them while Summerfield tugged. It took three pulls before it came out.

"The blood was gushing out after that," Gennari said. "I had to reapply the tourniquet and dressing. I provided basic and advanced care and included holistic nursing … that is to say that I held his hand, and promised not to leave him until he was safe."

Gennari's concern didn't stop there. He rode in the helicopter with Perez when Perez was evacuated out and has kept in touch with his memorable patient – who didn't lose his leg and is still rehabilitating. "I talked to him last week," Gennari said. "He shattered his femur, so he has a rod in his leg. He'll have some limitations but by the grace of God, they should be minimal.

"He's 21 years old and married. He'll be able to make babies with his wife."

Gennari (left) shrugs off the "hero" label when he hears it. Instead, he deflects praise to the "EOD guys" like Summerfield and the National Guard helicopter crews he worked with who routinely picked up injured servicemen and women from the hot zones in Afghanistan and elsewhere with little or no fanfare.

Gennari's six-month deployment with Bravo Surgical Company, II Medical Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force was easily the most dangerous of many he has served on around the world.

At Forward Operating Base (FOB) Edinburgh in Helmand Province, where Gennari said the "enemy was literally at the gate," Gennari and his crew of nurses and Corpsmen were responsible for keeping grievously wounded patients alive while they were transported by helicopter to the closest military hospital at U.S. Marine Base Camp Leatherneck. A large number of the patients they saw needed amputations.

"We didn't lose anyone who had a pulse," Gennari said.

The deployment convinced Gennari even more of the importance of providing demanding training to Navy nurses and Corpsmen. The nurses and Corpsmen are lifesavers in a combat zone, he said. "When I got to the FOB on the very first day, there were 26 to 28 Corpsmen and a Marine came in with both of his legs blown off," Gennari remembered. "They had never seen anything like that before." Navy nurses have two missions, Gennari explained – to provide patient care and to train Corpsmen. Corpsmen perform duties comparable to Licensed Practical Nurses.

Today, Gennari is back at Lovell FHCC, where he is the administrative manager of General Surgery, ENT and Urology. He hopes to use his position to heighten the focus on comprehensive, hands-on training for Navy nurses and Corpsmen.

"I want to promote Navy nurses here at the FHCC, and Corpsmen, being trained and ready to deploy any time," Gennari said.

Lovell FHCC is an excellent place to train nurses and Corpsmen, Gennari said. With its many outpatient clinics, emergency department, inpatient ward, critical care unit, and its relationship with Rosalind Franklin University and area colleges, training opportunities abound.

"This place is perfect," Gennari said. "We're in a teaching institution. We could have fellowships … Some of the greatest health care institutions in the world are in this area. Then you can have an incredibly educated and trained Nurse Corps."

Nurses are warriors on the battlefield, Gennari said. "I think nurses are warriors fighting pain and suffering, and that applies to any kind of nurse, every day. There's no rest from it."

Nurse Recognized During Nurses Week

When Medical Liaison Meryl Grant's daughter was 18, she asked her Mom a simple question: "If you could be anything, what would you be?

"And I said nurse," said Grant, who works at Lovell FHCC's Fisher Clinic at Naval Station Great Lakes. "I didn't even have to think about it. Then she asked me why I wasn't a nurse."

So, to make a long story short, Grant said she decided then and there to go to nursing school and change careers. That was seven years ago, and she hasn't looked back. For her efforts, she recently was honored as the Senior Civilian Employee of the Quarter.

"My job here brings together my nursing background and my business background because I'm always talking to people and negotiating," Grant said. "I love what I do."

A passion for patient-care is a common denominator for the 290 Navy and civilian nurses, 113 civilian nursing assistants, and the 557 Navy Corpsmen at Lovell FHCC.

"If you are a nurse, you really love it; you love what you do," said Registered Nurse Jesusa "GiGi" Aquino, who works in the Critical Care Unit at Lovell. "You really have a passion to be a nurse so you can give care to your patients."

"GiGi" Aquino who has been a nurse for 20 years, listens to the heart of a patient in the Center's Critical Care Unit

Aquino said she got into nursing, instead of engineering as her father originally hoped, because she watched her sister doing the job and knew that's what she wanted to do also.

May is the month nurses are recognized for the compassionate care they dispense year-round. Lovell's nurses marked Nursing Week with special seminars and events, including a ceremony in Bourke Hall.

"During Nurses Week, we take the time to highlight the diverse ways in which our nurses work to improve patient care," said Patient Services Associate Director Dr. Sarah Fouse. "Our nurses reflect a high degree of professionalism, effectiveness and efficiency in regards to providing excellent patient care."

"We have the best nurses anywhere," Fouse said.

Nurses, nursing assistants and Corpsmen work in numerous specialties and clinics at Lovell FHCC, including mental health, geriatrics, pediatrics, ambulatory, emergency, critical care, surgery and home health care.

Navy nurses have two missions. In addition to caring for patients, they are responsible for training Corpsmen. Under supervision, Independent Duty Corpsmen (IDCs) can see patients independently and prescribe medications. "They are the shock trauma nurses when they deploy," said Navy Cmdr. Sarah Stevick, who heads U.S.S. Tranquillity, a FHCC clinic on the grounds of Recruit Training Command. Stevick pointed out that IDCs man Tranquillity's three sick call clinics in "ships" at RTC, allowing recruits the convenience of being treated where they live.

Navy Lt. Caitlyn Workman treats a patient at U.S.S. Tranquillity. "Nursing is a way to give back to people who serve. It's my pleasure," said Workman

Navy Capt. Jamie Kersten, Associate Director of Fleet Medicine at Lovell FHCC, said she's proud to serve with the Navy Nurse Corps. "I'm constantly in awe of their level of expertise, professionalism, and extreme dedication to the patient and this great country of ours," she said.

Registered Nurse Myna Shegog, left, and Dr. William Lauth, Emergency Department physician discuss an X-ray in the ED

"These nurses are asked to step into harm's way to protect their patients and coworkers. They spend time away from their family treating traumatic injuries in war zones. They do humanitarian missions on land and sea, spreading goodwill throughout the world. They use state-of-the-art technology as well as improvising in austere conditions … I'm proud to have had the opportunity to work side-by-side as a member of their Corps."

Tomah

1300 Pounds Lost in Staff Weight Loss Challenge

In January, 53 teams embarked on the 12-week journey, to lose weight and adopt healthier lifestyles. The team named Operation Narrow Waist, consisting of Josh Kinner from facilities, Tiffany Kinner and Nick Rhea both from Nutrition and Food Service, lost a combined 11.5 percent of their body weight to surpass the 52 competing teams.

According to Shai Sims-Brown, the coordinator of the "Who's Losing It?" challenge and Tomah VA MOVE! Coordinator, the combined weight lost between the 53 teams was 1,343 pounds. The 178 participants lost between zero and 37 pounds, and the average weight lost was seven pounds per participant.

"While there were prizes involved in the challenge, the best prizes were personal satisfaction and the health gains associated with weight loss," said Sims Brown.

Nick Rhea, left, Tiffany Kinner and John Kinner lost a combined 11.5 percent of their body weight

Michael Peterson Makes a Repeat Visit

The Medical Center held its annual awards ceremony in March to recognize the Veterans who had entered the local Creative Arts Competition.

Once again assisting in the presentation of the awards was singer, songwriter and Grammy winner Michael Peterson, who has twice hosted the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Peterson's first festival was in LaCrosse, WI, in 2010 and it didn't take long for Peterson to understand the value of the arts in therapy – whether the art is visual, dramatic, creative writing, dance, or music.

During Peterson's visit, he helped present the Creative Arts awards to all the Veterans who had entered the local competition, which along with the awards ceremony was organized by VA Music Therapist, Jean Calhoun. During the course of the awards program, several Veterans shared their performance entries, including Keith Diamond, a VA employee and gold medal winner from the 2011 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Diamond sang Peterson's patriotic hit, "You Could Hear a Pin Drop." Much to Diamond's surprise and to the audience's delight, Peterson joined Diamond on stage to complete the song.

Country music artist Michael Peterson, left, congratulates Veteran Joey Abrams on the Creative Arts Festival award he was presented by Tomah Director Mario DeSanctis, right

Peterson spent the entire day at the facility, visiting Veterans in the Community Living Centers and then holding a "jam session" in the evening where he gave a mini-concert, told stories, answered questions, and signed autographs.

"Arts drive emotion, and emotion drives action," Peterson has told Creative Arts Festival audiences. "I want to use my gifts to reach out and move that emotion."

Visit By the Green Bay Packers

Wide receiver Jordy Nelson #87, kicker Mason Crosby #2, and safety Charlie Peprah #26, along with former Packers Marco Rivera #62, William Henderson #33 and Larry McCarren #54 pose for a photo with Veteran Ron Stone

Members of the Green Bay Packers dropped in for a visit at the Medical Center as part of their annual Tailgate Tour.

Packers President and CEO Mark Murphy, wide receiver Jordy Nelson, kicker Mason Crosby and safety Charlie Peprah, along with former Packers Marco Rivera, William Henderson and Larry McCarren, arrived at the Tomah VA and were greeted by a crowd of applauding Veterans and employees.

The Packers visited with Veterans who had gathered in the Main Dining Room for the occasion, which was organized by Voluntary Service Coordinator Laura Bishop and Recreational Therapist Jenna Gilbertson.

Korean War Veteran Herbert Hanson, right, visits with Packers wide receiver Jordy Nelson

Rivera said the experience touched him in many ways, but one experience came to mind immediately when he thought of the Tomah VA visit. He remembered that as the group was preparing to leave for another part of the VA, a Veteran asked for a picture with Rivera. Unprompted, he proceeded to take off his beret and place it on Rivera's head, wanting him to keep it. Rivera said he was truly touched when he learned during the day from the nurses that the Veteran never goes anywhere without that beret.

"That was very moving, because he's probably had that cap on his head since his time in the military," said Rivera. "He thought enough of me that he wanted to give me something personal, and all he asked in return was that I write him a letter. That's the first thing I'm going to do when I get home."

Annual Fishing Tournament

The 22nd Annual Fishing Tournament was held at the Tomah VA's pond. The event marks the long-awaited opening day of the pond's fishing season for Veterans staying at the VA.

The weather was awesome and the anglers were blessed with a beautiful morning to fish. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service generously stocked the pond three separate times with trout, perch, bass, and bluegill prior to the tournament, so the fishing was excellent.

The Veterans were escorted to the pond by 108 seventh grade students from the Tomah Middle School. The students helped the patients cast their lines and reel in their fish. It was a memorable day for the Veterans and the students.

Director Mario DeSanctis-left and Michael Christianson, VAVS Representative for American Legion, during the awards ceremony

This event was organized by Recreational Therapist Kathy Garrett and Voluntary Service and is sponsored every year by the American Legion which provides a picnic lunch for the Veterans and prizes for the biggest fish.

Veterans' Therapeutic Garden Opens

The VA opened its therapeutic gardens in a grand opening ceremony on May 18 behind Building 404. While the gardens will be enjoyed by all Veterans and staff, the purpose of the therapeutic gardens is for Veterans to develop, maintain and harvest vegetables with the goal of having a harvest dinner.

Standing in front of some of the garden planters are the members of the Leadership Development Program group that brought the idea of a garden for Veterans to life

The gardens consist of 14 wooden planters that are large enough for Veterans to sit on or roll to. The size of the planters allows Veterans to be able to plant and weed the gardens with ease.

Memorial Day Observance

The "Tribute to the Fallen" was read by staff members Erik Harvieux, center left, and Jacob Mason, center right, both Veterans, while Jean Calhoun, left, tolled each name by ringing a bell

A large crowd of Veteran patients, Tomah VA staff, members of the community, and distinguished guests attended the annual Memorial Day ceremony, which honored the fallen of our nation.

The program was opened by the Director, Mario V. DeSanctis, who spoke about the importance of not forgetting the sacrifices that made the United States the country it is today.

Col. Robert Humphrey, the garrison deputy commander at nearby Fort McCoy, delivered the keynote speech about the importance of Memorial Day and remembering America's heroes who paid the ultimate sacrifice for a grateful nation.

The Memorial Day program featured patriotic band music, as well as music from individuals. The Tomah High School Band performed several selections at the program, and Navy Veteran John Elliot concluded the ceremony on bagpipes.

The observance paid respect to those who didn't come home with the annual *Tribute to the Fallen*, a reading of the names of Wisconsin's Service members, who fell in Iraq and Afghanistan. The tribute was accompanied by the playing of "*Ashokan Farewell*" by Joni Wendal and Ruth Kielley, members of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Clinical Nutrition Manager Kelly Christen, left, and Chief of social Work Cathy Routh walk in the 2012 VA2K

VA2K Challenge

The 2012 VA2K was a huge success with 110 employees, volunteers, Veterans, and community members walking. Donations valued at over $550 were made to support the homeless Veteran programs.

Tomah VA had a challenge with Iron Mountain VA for the most walkers – Iron Mountain won the challenge for the most participants with 118 walking. Nonetheless, Tomah VA was a winner in that the facility went from 10 walkers in 2011 to 110 in 2012!

And – the real winners are the Veterans who will benefit from the donations provided in conjunction with this event.

Awards and Recognition

Nurse Executive Honored by VA Secretary Shinseki

Rebecca (Becky) **Kordahl** was among six Department of Veterans Affairs nurses and executives honored June 1 at a ceremony in Washington. Kordahl received a 2012 Award for the Advancement of Nursing Programs from Secretary Eric K. Shinseki.

The annual awards are given to individuals who were nominated by their colleagues for outstanding service to Veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The six 2012 award recipients were selected for having "displayed the best characteristics and the highest level of dedication to their profession."

Kordahl was appointed Associate Director for Patient Care Services at the Madison VA Hospital in September 2004.

Kordahl was instrumental in raising the level of care, safety, access satisfaction and performance improvement which resulted in the Madison VA Hospital achieving Magnet recognition in 2010. She is an active youth mentor in Madison and has held leadership positions in numerous professional and civic organizations throughout her career.

Honor Bestowed to Madison Researcher

Dr. Ted Goodfriend was selected as the 2012 Health Care Hero by the American Red Cross Badger Chapter for his many years of "single -handedly recruiting volunteer physicians working in the MEDiC Clinic at Grace Church Men's Shelter…his compassion in caring for the patients has set the bar high for all of us privileged to work at Grace. "Through Dr. Goodfriend's work, MEDiC Clinics have grown to include seven locations in the community addressing the medical and mental health needs of homeless men and women.

Goodfriend is Assistant Chief of Staff for Research at William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital.

Health Technician Honored by CDC

It was another first for the Lovell FHCC when the Illinois Department of Public Health announced that Lovell FHCC Technician **Rosalinda DeJesus** was selected as Illinois' first Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Childhood Immunization Champion.

The Illinois Centers for Disease Control (CDC) explained that the CDC Childhood Immunization Champion Award is a new annual award to honor individuals who make a significant contribution toward improving public health through work in childhood immunization.

Someone You Should Know

A New Leader at Hines, But No Stranger to VISN 12

An experienced and seasoned healthcare executive took over as the Director of the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in June. **Joan M. Ricard** is now at the helm of the largest VA in Illinois. She brings with her more than 33 years of healthcare experience at all levels of Hospital administration.

Ms. Ricard was appointed Director of the El Paso Health Care System on December 7, 2008 and has placed a strong emphasis on leadership, account-tability, quality and outcomes ever since. Prior to arriving in El Paso, Ms. Ricard held key leadership positions at the Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System in Tucson, the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System in Prescott, the Marion VA Medical Center in downstate Illinois and the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee. Ms. Ricard's diverse career includes nurse manager and staff nurse positions as well.

"I am excited to be moving back to Network 12, where my career with the Department of Veterans Affairs began," said Director Ricard. "Additionally, I am thrilled to be returning to a large healthcare facility that is associated with a prestigious medical facility like Loyola.

According to Ms. Ricard, her goals echo the strategic goals of Secretary Shinseki's: improve the quality, accessibility, and value of health care; increase Veteran satisfaction, improve workforce satisfaction and make Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital an employer of choice. "In my opinion, one of the largest challenges facing the Hines VA will be to meet the growing demand for healthcare services particularly in the area of mental health services," she said. "I want to create the legacy that the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital is Veteran centric and provides outstanding healthcare to our Nation's Heroes."

Ms. Ricard received her Bachelor of Science degree from Marquette University, where she majored in nursing. She received her Master's Degree in Health

Administration from Baylor University. Ms. Ricard is Board Certified in Healthcare Management and a Fellow with the American College of Health Care Executives.

People Helping People—What Would We Do Without Our Volunteers!

A 102-year-old Lake Mills, WI, woman was among 650 volunteers honored for making a difference in the lives of America's Veterans April 25 at the **Madison** VA Hospital's annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon.

The year's highest honor was awarded to **Leona Graf** on left accompanied by Director Judy McKee, was recognized with the hospital's first-ever Centurion Lifetime Achievement Award for more than four decades of service that concluded when she retired from volunteering late last year at the age of 101. Graf, now 102 years old, accumulated a total of 5,852 hours of service during 43 years as a VA Hospital volunteer.

Volunteering has been in **Bob Gibbons'** blood since high school, and he's got the history to prove it.

The old Army Veteran and longtime **Milwaukee** VA volunteer has given decades of service to others, and Guardian Credit Union is returning the favor by naming a college scholarship in his honor.

"We knew we were going to get drafted after graduation, so we took care of it ourselves and enlisted after high school." He was part of the Army's field artillery and spent 14 months in Korea from 1948 to 1949, before the war. He came home, got a full-time job, but kept volunteering, this time spending 49 years on the board of Guardian Credit Union in West Allis, where he kept an eye on the books, planned scholarships and helped take care of community outreach. He continued that work even after retiring from the gas company, and took up a part-time job as an usher at Miller Park in 1974, a job he still has today. But most Wednesdays, you can find him at the Milwaukee VA, where he visits with older residents in our Community Living Center. If he's not chatting with them in their room, he's calling bingo or taking them out on the patio to admire the garden. He's been volunteering at the Milwaukee VA with the American Red Cross for 12 years. That works out to 2,408 hours and counting. Not bad for a guy who is 83 years old himself.

"I might be older than some of the people I visit, but it's a lot of fun," he said. "I'm not perfect, but my legs work, and I can move, and so I do it." "I've gotten so much from the VA, I like to give back," he says with a shrug.

Steve Wesson, the credit union president, said it was a no-brainer because Gibbons embodies their credo of "people helping people." "To think he has been doing this for almost 50 years, coming to meetings once or twice a month, reaching out to people, and helping them get loans, whether it's for a home, a car or someone who has fallen on hard times. He genuinely cares about people," Wesson said. "That's why the scholarship isn't just about academics, but really focuses on the volunteerism." The Dollars For Scholars scholarship is available to high school seniors with outstanding community leadership.

Gibbons said the idea that a scholarship in his name will live on long after he is gone is bemusing and humbling. "That's kind of unreal that it will be forever and ever," he said. "That makes me a little tearful."

Since February 2012, a corps of dedicated volunteers at the **Tomah** VA have been providing around the clock coverage so that "no Veteran dies alone."

Based on the Hospice unit, the volunteers are called in when a Veteran is actively dying and are scheduled so that there is always someone at the bedside. When a Veteran wakes up, someone is at their side. In the past four months, the volunteers have been present for the peaceful passing of 13 Veterans, serving over 650 hours.

With the support of the Hospice and Palliative Care team, Recreational Therapist Amanda Hageman, Voluntary Service Coordinator Laura Bishop and the

Hospice Unit Coordinator Helene Stein, the Hospice unit has made an immediate impact on Veterans and their families. This presence has not gone unnoticed.

The daughter of a Veteran who passed away in the presence of a volunteer sent this note of thanks:

"My father was at the VA hospice facility and recently passed away. I found out at the end of his illness about the wonderful program that has been initiated at your facility. I want to commend you and the VA for this. As a family member and working full time, I could not always get away to be at his bedside.

Knowing that there was someone there to help him, read to him or even hold his hand was so heartfelt to me. These are some very special people who would give of their time to come sit for hours with someone who was a stranger at first. Again, thank you so much for what you do. God bless you and your volunteers."

Charles Roth, the **Tomah** VA Medical Center Voluntary Service (VAVS) Representative for the American Veterans (AMVETS) received the VAVS National Advisory Commit-tee's 2012 Male Volunteer of the Year award by Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health during a ceremony in Charleston, SC.

Roth was nominated for the award by members of the AMVETS.

"I was surprised, but I'm happy for it because it means a lot to Tomah," said Roth.

Tomah VA Voluntary Services Coordinator Laura Bishop said Roth has served 524 hours of volunteer service since August 2006, with many more behind-the-scenes hours logged in preparation for events and activities.

"He's very dedicated to the Veterans and very involved with the Veterans organizations that he's a part of," Bishop said.

Roth is involved in various capacities at the VA. "He's been really instrumental in nominating Veterans for our Hall of Heroes," Bishop said, adding that he is very thorough and detail-orientated when making nominations. Roth also arranges events outside the Medical Center for Veterans, as well as special programs at the Tomah VA on significant military days including Patriot Day and Pearl Harbor Day. He plans recreational activities for Veterans at the Tomah VA, such as the popular Night at the Races, which gives Veterans the chance to make non-monetary bets on videotaped horse and dog races. Veterans bet on the winners prior to the races being shown and can win prizes for choosing well. The AMVETS chapter Roth is affiliated with also has donated two golf carts for the Tomah VA Golf Course and has done restorative work at the park dedicated to Veterans at Petenwell Lake near Necedah.

"What I try to do is use the donated money and directly give it to the Veterans in some way," Roth said. Roth said serving Veterans is his greatest honor, yet he speaks humbly of receiving the award, noting it represents not just his work, but the work of the Tomah VA and AMVETS as well.

"No one person can get an award like I got by himself," Roth said. "You have to have a lot of good support. I brought (the award) back for Tomah, not just myself, but for anybody that has contributed is part of the award. Those Veterans have given up an awful lot of their life. We owe them a great deal."

Emergency Preparedness

Each year hurricanes, tornados, floods, fires, and other severe storms devastate communities across our nation. You can help by signing up to assist when disasters strike!

VISN 12 participates in several disaster response programs where pre-identified and trained VHA staff can be sent to an area of the U.S. that needs medical assistance after a disaster event. One of these programs is the VA National Emergency Medical Response Team— or NEMRT, for short. There are three nationwide teams, which are made up of 250 VA medical and administrative professionals who are "on-call" during a specified period of the year. If selected to deploy, VHA staff are assigned to work for two weeks in temporary field medical shelters providing non-acute healthcare services for Veterans and the general populations within communities adversely affected by catastrophic events.

While deployed, VHA staff are paid their salary and provided travel and per diem funds. In preparation for the upcoming Hurricane Season, we are looking for additional staff interested in joining our NEMRT. For more information on NEMRT and how to join the team, visit the VISN 12 Surge Team Intranet Site or talk to your local facility Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.

Federal Emergency Management Agency's Top 10 Disaster Preparedness Items

Thinking ahead and storing a few key items before a disaster occurs can help keep your family safe and put you in a better position to assist your neighbors. ***The top 10 Disaster Preparedness Items are:***

1. Water, one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation;
2. Food, at least three-day supply of non-perishable food;
3. Battery-powered/hand crank radio;
4. Flashlight and extra batteries;
5. First aid kit;
6. Whistle to signal for help;
7. Dust mask, plastic sheeting, and duct tape to help filter contaminated air and insulate shelter
8. Manual can opener;
9. Local maps (printed);
10. Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger.

Note from the Editor

This is my last issue as Editor of ***The Great Lakes News***. I will be retiring June 30th after 44 years of government service.

The Great Lakes News was created back in 1996. I had the privilege of being on the board who developed the newsletter and have been the Editor ever since. What once was an arduous task, has become one of the most pleasurable parts of my job and I will sorely miss developing, and communicating with all of you through the newsletter.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the contributors to each issue of the newsletter, the VISN 12 Public Affairs Officers and other staff from the sites, our Webmaster, and the VISN office support staff. They are the folks that had the hard job…they wrote the articles, took the photos, cut and pasted, printed and did all the mailings - I just did minor editing, organized the layout and ensured that the newsletter got published and distributed -hopefully on time!

It has been my absolute honor and privilege, to have worked each day at the VA with all of you advocating for "America's Real Heroes," ***the Veteran***.

Farewell and God speed to you all. Linda DeRaad

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