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Fisher House for Hines

A Fisher House on Hines VA Hospital campus may become a reality sooner than anticipated. "Fisher House for Hines" a group made up of members of the Chicagoland community including Illinois Lt. Governor Quinn's office, DMS Pharmaceuticals and other area organizations, held a successful fundraiser in April. Nathan Geraths, Hines Director, was on hand at the event when the group presented the Fisher House organization with a \$500,000 check toward the cause.



April's benefit dinner was attended by numerous Hines employees, (from left standing) Dr. Kennedy, Patricia Moss, Dr. O'Hara, Dr. Adams, (seated) Dr. Baumann, and Hines Director Mr. Geraths and Mary Alice Geraths.

Numerous community organizations have been making substantial donations to the Hines Fisher House, with a local VFW post in Skokie Valley, Illinois donating \$100,000 for the cause. The goal of the group is to raise \$1.75 million toward a Hines Fisher House.

Speakers at the Benefit included Lt. Governor Quinn, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Tammy Duckworth and several other distinguished veterans. A Fisher House is a "home away from home" for the families of veterans staying at the VA hospital. Since Hines is the network Polytrauma site and has numerous out-of-state patients coming for treatment, facility employees are greatly anticipating the building of the Fisher House.

Oscar-nominated actor Gary Sinise, star of *CSI NY* and the movie *Forrest Gump*, also donated \$25,000 to the Fisher House for Hines cause at a press event last month. Sinise stated he was "proud to offer his support for a Fisher House at the Hines VA to support our injured service members and their families."



Bill Anderson, DMS Pharmaceuticals Co-Chair of Fisher House for Hines, Debbie Rickert, Operation Support our Troops, Gary Sinise, Oscar-nominated actor, Sam Lazich, Co-Chair of the Fisher House for Hines organization, pose with a check.

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Network News

Hines

High-Profile Visitors

Hines has had a number of high-profile visitors lately. Newly-elected Illinois Congressman Peter Roskam visited the facility for the first time, receiving a briefing about the hospital services and an extensive tour of the facility. Prior to planning a visit to Hines, the Congressman and his staff contacted several hundred constituents for feedback about the services provided by the hospital. Upon arriving at Hines, Congressman Roskam reported that his constituents were overwhelmingly positive about the facility and brought up no concerns or issues. The Congressman was very favorably impressed by his visit to the facility and congratulated staff throughout the facility on a job well done.

Illinois Senator Dick Durbin also visited Hines recently to meet with several Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) polytrauma patients and Hines leadership.



Senator Dick Durbin D-IL, addresses reporters at a press conference held at Hines. Two Polytrauma patients and their families also attended the press conference and spoke very highly of the Hines staff.

After meeting with Hines staff and patients, the Senator held a press conference in the lobby of the Spinal Cord Injury Building. All major news media in the Chicago area, including the ABC, NBC and CBS affiliates, the

Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun Times, CLTV and WGN, Channel 9, were in attendance at the press conference. Two television stations ran live remotes from the facility and appeared live on the noon news with the story. Senator Durbin kicked off the press conference by remarking about the dedication and compassion of the Hines staff. The majority of his remarks focused on a bill he is working on regarding funding for veteran healthcare.



Robert Jordan, anchorman for the WGN Channel 9 News in Chicago, ran a live remote on the noon news covering Senator Durbin's visit to the facility.

Bike the Drive

As part of the Healthier US Veterans program, many Hines employees have been taking part in lunchtime walks around the facility. During the month of May, a number of employees also took advantage of a special deal on membership at the neighboring Loyola Health and Fitness Center, with a group joining together and working out every morning before work. Hines employees have also been forming teams to participate in numerous activities around the Chicagoland area. Annette Katamay headed a group who participated in the Mother's Day Breast Cancer Walk. Another group of employees have been training for the Hustle up the Hancock race.

Over Memorial Day weekend a group of Hines employees participated in the Bike-the-Drive-Race along Lakeshore Drive.



Among those who participated were (pictured from left) John Clifton, Jeff Gering, Don Thomas and Laura Ruzick.

Hard Work Has Paid Off

Over the past several years, Hines has been focused on improving inpatient satisfaction scores. Employees have shown incredible commitment to making patients' experiences at the facility as positive as possible and have implemented many new ideas in order to better meet patients' needs.

Since 2005, Hines' overall inpatient satisfaction scores have consistently been on the rise. For the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2007, 82.4 percent of the patients rated the inpatient care at the facility as "Very Good" or "Excellent." This is a tremendous improvement and reflects the hard work and dedication of all employees. Congratulations!

Dental Offers the Latest Technology On the Market

For most veterans, a trip to the dentist is something they do not look forward to. Dental waiting rooms across the country can be crowded places; filled with people who are waiting for an appointment they have been dreading. Once you are in the chair, dentists seem to be using old

fashioned equipment to cobble together something temporary, like a crown. Then you are told that you have to return for another visit to have a permanent fix, taking more time and inconvenience and prolonging a process that is already not enjoyable.

The Hines VA Dental Service is now running a new state-of-the-art piece of equipment that changes all that. The new equipment, called CEREC IIID, offers patients a single visit treatment when they need a crown. The resulting tooth restoration is tooth colored, very long lasting and does not require patients to undergo uncomfortable impressions when they get a crown. In today's world, it is still very rare to see the CEREC IIID technology in individual dentists' offices. It makes getting a crown a one-stop-shopping experience.

Patient response to the new piece of equipment at Hines has been overwhelmingly positive. Dustin Howell, an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran who completed an inpatient stay at the Hines Blind Center and got some dental work done while he was at the hospital, was thrilled by the new technology. "This is great," he said. "I was dreading getting this crown but with this new piece of equipment the process was painless and very fast. I am very impressed with the latest technology used here at Hines."



Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran Dustin Howell (pictured center), Dr. Victor Pavlych and Dental Assistant Lou Lowman are pictured with the new CEREC IIID technology.

Dr. Jerry Kohen, Chief of the Hines Dental Service, says the staff in the Dental Service is thrilled to offer patients the new technology. "Like the rest of the employees at Hines, the staff in Dental is proud to serve veterans of all eras," he said. "It is especially gratifying to be able to offer them services provided with the latest technology available on the market."

Polytrauma Staff Holds Dinner for Vets and Families

Hines staff is committed to trying new and fun ways to connect with OEF/OIF patients and their families. Recently, a complementary dinner for all Hines Polytrauma veterans, active duty service members and their families was coordinated by Amanda Sobel, a social worker at the facility. The dinner, funded by a private donor, was held Thursday, May 24th at Maggiano's in Oak Brook. The goal of this event was to create a supportive environment where people with similar situations could meet, socialize and gather educational information.

Amanda Sobel, provided an introduction at the dinner. Philicia Deckard from Brain Injury Association (BIA) of Illinois briefly presented information on brain injury resources. The mood was positive and supportive during the dinner. Family members, shared stories, and gained information about local BIA activities. There were a total of 33 participants. Hines employees Amanda Urban, PhD, Laura Kulawiak, LSP, and Annette Katamay were present during the dinner as well helping to facilitate the event. All attending had an enjoyable evening.

Jesse Brown

Memorial Day Activities

For the first time ever, Jesse Brown VAMC provided a float for Chicago's Memorial Day Parade on May 26. Over 50 veterans from the medical center either rode or marched alongside the float, which included a sound system that enabled members of the Jesse Brown Chorus to entertain the crowd with several gold award-winning musical numbers from the National Veterans Creative Arts competition.



A Memorial Service is held at Jesse Brown VAMC twice a year, coinciding with Memorial Day and Veterans Day, to honor the memory of veterans that JBVAMC has been privileged to serve. Veterans, family members, employees, volunteers and visitors are welcome to attend. Staff members are encouraged to submit the names of family members who are veterans or on active duty who have passed during the previous year.



During the May 17th service, Anne McDermott, Nursing Service, lights a candle to honor the memory of a veteran. Chaplain Samuel Adamson, who officiated, looks on.

Preserving the Memories of World War II and Other African-American Veterans

StoryCorps Griot, a national oral history project dedicated to preserving African American stories in sound, visited Jesse Brown VA Medical Center to record interviews with African American veterans, particularly those from World War II. Funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, StoryCorps Griot plans to conduct 1,750 interviews this year from throughout the country.

Interviews were conducted at JBVAMC on June 28-29th and will be again on Friday, July 27. Arrangements can be made to schedule an interview through July 28. Interviews generally last about 40 minutes and are orally recorded, not filmed.

Veterans who are interviewed will receive a CD copy of the interview as soon as it is completed. With the veteran's permission, a copy of the interview will also be sent to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and the National Museum of African American History and Culture at the Smithsonian Institute. Portions of the interview may even be used as part of a PBS special.

A StoryCorps interview is a conversation between two people who know each other. One person acts as the interviewer, and the other is the storyteller, or both people interview each other. It could be two veterans conversing about their wartime experiences or a veteran being interviewed by his son or daughter. A StoryCorps facilitator will be present throughout the interview process to handle the technical aspects of the recording and provide veterans with a comfortable and meaningful experience.

The griot (pronounced gree-oh), part of West African tradition, is a role of honor, designating someone who maintains community tradition and memory through storytelling, music, and dance. Veterans who want to record their experiences for posterity or share the history of other vets now have the opportunity to serve as a griot for the veterans' community.

JBVAMC's partnership with StoryCorps is an exciting opportunity to document the history of the African American veterans who have served our country during

World War II or other conflicts. For more information or to make an appointment to be interviewed, call Ray Leber, JBVAMC Public Affairs Officer, at (312) 569-6402.

Passport and Travel Fair

A Passport and Travel Fair sponsored by the Employer of Choice Committee at Jesse Brown VAMC on April 20 attracted a crowd of employees and veterans who wanted to receive a new or renewed passport. Representatives from a local travel agency were also available to offer discounts on travel.



Darlene Castiglione, Medical Service, prepares her nephew, Jimmy, to have his passport photo taken.

Madison

Gun Locks for Patients at Risk

VA Madison has an aging veteran population and young veterans returning from deployment. These two populations are at higher risk for suicide and often have young children in their homes, either their own children or their grandchildren. As a public health safety measure, VA Madison decided that their veterans should have easy access to gun locks and gun safety information. One of their patient psychiatric nursing staff members, Carlyle Pell, who is also a veteran himself, was able to obtain 200 gun locks through the Marshall Police Department for their patients.



(from left) Unit 2B Staff - Carlyle Pell, LPN, Unit 2B ; Helen Fitzgerald, Suicide Prevention Coordinator; and David Welo, Nurse Manager, Unit 2B. The gun locks are wrapped in a brochure that outlines gun safety and also includes a firearms responsibility contract for children.

VA Madison is making the gun locks available in their inpatient psychiatric unit, the emergency department, the addictive disorders program, the patient education center, outpatient psychiatry, and the local Vet Center. A veteran who was suicidal when he came into their inpatient psychiatric unit stated the following when offered a gun lock for his weapon, "This will make me take one more step before I use it and could save my life."

Annual HIPAA Awareness Day Conducted

VA Madison along with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Committee sponsored their annual HIPAA Awareness Day to promote individual awareness and protection of personal health information (PHI) in day-to-day operations.



Events staff participated in: web enabled training modules for privacy and information security along with staff quizzes; informational materials on medical identity theft, information security and patient privacy; a special appearance by the HIPAA Mascot; and a Putting Contest for PHI.

Milwaukee

Positive Patriotic Parade

Network Director James Roseborough enjoys the positive patriotic parade at Milwaukee's Reclaiming Our Heritage on June 2. The parade had record attendance and nice weather. The event offers the community an opportunity to tour the historic buildings on the medical center campus and be a part of living history.



North Chicago

Bring Your Child to Work Day

North Chicago VAMC held the yearly event, "Bring Your Child to Work" on Thursday, April 26. An organized program was planned for all children who wished to participate. The program began with breakfast provided by the Canteen. The children toured various departments of the medical center. Highlights of the day's event, were tours of biomedical engineering and

audiology, and the K-9 demonstration by Police Sergeant/K-9 Enforcement Officer, Bill Poirier and his canine partner Chako. The children were treated to a pizza luncheon. The day wrapped up for the children with an arts and crafts activity provided by Community Affairs. Based on comments received from the children, this was truly an exciting and fun day at the VA.



Their dedication, enthusiasm, and professionalism have contributed to the quality care received by the veterans and navy personnel.

An Open House was held in the laboratory on Wednesday April 25, 2007, and tours of the Lab facilities were given.



North Chicago VA Laboratory Staff

Pictured back row from left: Stephanie Traynoff, Carol Sligting, Jessie Tahlier, Maurice Pennick, Kristine Pegues, Betty Aguirre, Walter Lewis. 2nd row from left: Tracy Rebellato, Carmelita Barin, Gordon Escondo, Carolyn Bell. 1st row from left: Linda Dowell, Jerome Weathersby

National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week

National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (NMLPW) is a yearly recognition of the important role the nation's and, indeed, the world's laboratory professionals play in providing quality healthcare to patients.

Since laboratorians work behind the scenes, few people know much about the critical testing these professionals perform every day. The laboratory is a critical component of quality healthcare. Because virtually every clinical diagnosis begins with a lab test, it's appropriate to say that the nation's health depends on its laboratories.

North Chicago VAMC Lab consists of various departments such as Phlebotomy, Anatomic Pathology and Cytology, Chemistry, Hematology, Urinalysis, Coagulation, Microbiology, and Blood Transfusion Service. The Lab is staffed 24/7/365. The lab staff have worked diligently this past year to keep up with the almost 20% increase in their workload due to the VA/DoD Sharing of the Emergency Department, Surgical Department, and inpatient admissions of DoD patients.

Nursing a Profession and a Passion!

National Nurses Week – May 6-12 was celebrated at North Chicago VAMC. The Excellence in Nursing Award annually honors four individuals: two Registered Nurses, one in a staff nurse role and one in an expanded nurse role; a Licensed Practical Nurse or Licensed Vocational Nurse; and a Nursing Assistant. Awardees are actively engaged in the care of patients at a VA facility. The recipients' contributions to the care of patients in any VA health care setting are patient-centered and demonstrate such excellence as to merit recognition from peers.

On Thursday, May 10, 2007, during National Nurses Week, North Chicago VA Medical Center Leadership presented nursing staff members with certificates and awards for being either selected as a recipient of the 2007 North Chicago Excellence in Nursing Award or a nominee in the following categories:



Ms. Pauline Ring, LPN selected for the North Chicago VAMC LPN category. Ms. Ring selected for the LPN category as well as the winner in this category for VISN 12. Her nomination package was forwarded to Central Office for consideration of the Secretary's Award, Excellence in Nursing.



Above, Lisa Bodell, RN, 2007 Staff Nurse Recipient.

Below, Davis Bullock, NA, Staff Nursing Assistant Recipient.



Nominees also recognized for their accomplishments are as follows: Mr. Ira Young, NA, and Mr. Ronald Arnold, NA. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!

Boy Scouts Say Thanks To Our Veterans

Boy Scouts from the Blackhawk District participated in the annual Blackhawk District Camporee over the weekend of April 20-22. This year's theme was "Duty to Country" as over 325 scouts gathered at the Great Lakes Naval Training Base. On Saturday morning, all of the participants marched to the North Chicago VAMC, where the Scouts spent the day participating in several activities with some of the veterans. Certain events were scored for the competitive portion of the outing that was designed to allow the scouts and veterans to interact with each other. In one activity, the scouts worked directly with the vets to put on a short skit, song or dramatic play. The veterans seemed to really appreciate having the scouts include them in these activities. In another activity, scouts and vets tried to "Name the Flag" as there were several historic flags from a Wisconsin flag museum. They also worked together to prepare over 300 torn and tattered American flags the scouts had collected for a proper and fitting retirement. In addition, the scouts and vets joined together to participate in an event titled "Hold'em and Fold'em" where they did their best to fold a huge oversized flag in the fastest time.

In the afternoon, the scouts and vets played cards, chess and checkers and worked together to design and complete a 12'x12' quilt section honoring the veteran's service to our country. The vet's helped the Scouts design the "quilt" by telling them something where they served and some of the things they experienced. Each unit was also asked to prepare a quilt section before arriving at the Camporee. These quilt sections were all joined together. The finished quilt will hang in the lobby to display the scouts respect for the veterans and thank them for their service to our country.

And while all of the scouts enjoyed the day's activities, it was the veteran's that told us how much this day meant to them. Many of the veterans were Boy Scouts before joining the armed services. The smiles on the veteran faces and their laughter when interacting with the youth told the story of how a day the scouts dedicated to "Duty to Country" had made these veterans feel that we continue to appreciate their efforts in protecting our freedoms.

Scouts and vets joined together to participate in an event titled "Hold'em and Fold'em" where they did their best to fold a huge oversized flag in the fastest time.



women's' health issues, HIV/AIDS awareness, medication safety, hearing safety, hand hygiene and Walking Your Way to Health. Several employee awareness booths were added this year, among them OEF/OIF awareness and My HealthVet in addition to Naval Health Clinic Wellness Center/MWR.

The event was well supported by Blue Cross/ Blue Shield, Mail Handlers and Unicare. Reflexology, back massage and intoxication goggles were graciously provided by them and as always were a popular attraction! Canteen Service supported the event by providing a constant supply of fresh apples and an abundance of door prizes.

Catholic Charities Elder Abuse, A Safe Place, and Lake County against Sexual Assault all had representatives present, providing information on their individual services. Their contact information is available in Employee Health Clinic. There was a booth on TOPS (Take off Pounds Sensibly). Informational brochures on several topics of interest were made available at the event.

Staff from all areas volunteered at the registration desk. A special thanks to all staff that contributed to the planning and execution of the Wellness Fair. It was a resounding success and would not have been so without the wonderful creative participation of so many!!

Spring Into Health!

The 4th annual All Employee Wellness Fair at the North Chicago VAMC was held on Thursday May 17th, 2007. Once again, the fair had excellent attendance with nearly 400 employees participating in the event. The "circuit room" allowed employees to gain knowledge on their height and weight, pulse oximetry, spirometry, blood pressure, blood glucose, and waist/hip ratios. Those who participated in the circuit room were given documentation of their results and tips on healthy living. Assistance of several medical students from Rosalind Franklin University of Health Sciences and corpsmen from Navy was rendered as well.

Clinical staff were present to discuss lifestyle changes and appropriate follow-up. In addition there were booths on dental health, foot health, colon cancer screening,



Walk Away the Pounds demonstration. Several other demonstrations were held including Jazzercise and Nutrition/Healthy Cooking.



Blood pressure was taken in the "circuit room." The "circuit room" allowed employees to gain knowledge on their height and weight, pulse oximetry, spirometry, blood pressure, blood glucose, and waist/hip ratios.

Service Organizations Donate Communication Equipment

Members of 3 local service organizations have just made life a lot easier for the staff and patients of North Chicago VA ICU. When Dr. Raúl Gazmuri, chief of ICU was looking for a way to help ventilator dependent and tracheotomized patients communicate, he turned to Megan Ballantine, Speech Pathologist for help. Together, they reviewed several augmentative communication devices before deciding on the Dynavox DV4. The device was programmed specifically for a hospital setting with access to the pain scale and other commonly needed information. Using a touch screen, patients can generate messages from many categories. A keyboard is available for developing original messages. The device then "speaks" the message for them. Patients can even control their environment by allowing them to manage their lights, fan, and even their television. There is a "head mouse" available for those veterans who are unable to use their hands. Voluntary Service coordinated the generous donations of Wheeling Amvets Post 66, Deerfield American Legion Post 738, and the American Legion 10th District so that 2 Dynavox devices and many accessories could be purchased. Jim Gavin and Diego Vega from Biomedical Engineering

completed the project when they installed the devices in the ICU. By allowing veterans to participate in their medical care, we improve their quality of life.

President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors

The President's Commission on Care for America's Wounded Warriors was established by Executive Order and was asked to conduct a comprehensive review of services America is providing to our wounded warriors and deliver recommendations to the President, Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Veterans Affairs this summer.



Dr. Furman, Chief of Surgery at North Chicago VAMC provides a tour through the surgical service



Patrick Sullivan, Medical Center Director and Captain Thomas McGue, Commanding Officer Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes brief the Commission on the VA/DoD Partnership between the two facilities.

Tomah

Fishing Tournament

About 100 veterans enjoyed a morning of fishing at the Tomah VA's pond on May 16. The annual fishing tournament is a collaborative event, made possible by the American Legion, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Tomah Middle School.

The American Legion is the primary sponsor of the Tomah VA's pond, going back to the 1950's. This year, the Legion purchased an extension to the fishing dock, which was used for the first time at the tournament. The Legion also provides a 'brat-and-hot-dog' lunch for everyone at the tournament and prizes for the lucky fishermen (and women).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have several entities that support this event. The Genoa Hatchery stocks the pond—1,000 rainbow trout were introduced into the pond two weeks before the tournament! Staff from the Resources Office served delicious fried fish all morning and also assisted with the official measuring of the fish.

This year, 100 seventh-grade students from Tomah Middle School went to the wards and escorted the veterans to the pond, helping them bait hooks, cast lines and reel in the "big one." The students also kept the veterans warm with fresh coffee and fed with brats, fried walleye, etc. After the tournament, the students broke into groups and toured the facility.



Students from the Tomah Middle School assisted veterans as they fished at the Tomah VA's pond in May. The fishing tournament at the VA marked the opening day of "fishing season" and was the first official event for the new pier extension, shown on the left side of the photo.

2nd Annual Jim Thielen Memorial Golf Tournament on May 19.

Jim Thielen was the Roads and Grounds Foreman at the Tomah VA and was the driving force behind converting the Tomah VA's golf course from a patient-only course to one open to the public. The conversion was the result of a mandate to VA facilities with golf courses from Central Office ten years ago: *Make your golf courses self-sufficient or close them.* Thielen worked relentlessly to create and market a golf course that would be enjoyed by the public and therapeutic to the patients. Thielen retired in April 2005 and died unexpectedly that June.

The golf tournament serves as a fund-raiser (over \$2,000 was generated for golf course operations) and as a way to introduce the course to the public. This year, 67 golfers participated in the tournament. In addition to the tournament itself, each hole had a \$50 sponsor and a contest for the golfers; and a separate putting contest was conducted by Thielen's brother, Ron Thielen of Ohio.

This year, the "pro-shop" at the Tomah VA's Veterans Golf Course is operated seven days a week by volunteers. The volunteers serve the paying customers and distribute golf and fishing equipment as well as bicycles to VA patients.



VA employee Cal Hanby, mechanic, won the putting contest. The putting contest was sponsored by Jim Thielen's brother, Ron. Each golfer got one free putt, but if they wanted to try to do better, it cost \$1. The contest raised \$88.

VA INITIATES ‘V.E.T.S.’ PROGRAM

The Tomah VA has a new program called “Veterans Express ThemSelves” or V.E.T.S.

The program is the creation of professional artist Jane Thissen, who has worked with art and special populations for years through Very Special Arts, or VSA.

V.E.T.S. is a program facilitating art for veterans to express themselves as an adjunct to traditional therapy. It consists of weekly sessions in most areas of the medical center: both acute and long term mental health, nursing home units, including those with dementia, and an open studio for both inpatients and outpatients. The artist encourages abstract work with vibrant colors – the results have been beautiful and inspiring. Several murals have been created and mounted on the units for the veterans to enjoy. A garden mural featuring “mandalas” (round paintings that vary in theme, but end up looking like flower blossoms once mounted to the mural itself) will soon be added to the entry way of the facility’s “Memory Garden.” Veterans on the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder unit created small individual canvases, which were mounted as a border in the day room on the unit.

Everyone who enters a room during a V.E.T.S. session is given a paintbrush and asked to participate in the creation. Here, Carol Harmon, Facilities Services, paints with a veteran.



The end result is a garden scene mural that will be prominently displayed for all to see!

Recently, the Tomah VA received a \$5,000 Special Arts Grant from Recreation Therapy Service in VA Central Office. The funds will be used to compensate Ms. Thissen for her face-to-face time at the medical center. Her supplies are purchased with donated funds.

VAMC Is Chosen To Participate In CREW

The Tomah VA – more specifically the staff of the “North Woods Lodge” unit (Building 403B) – has been selected to participate in a pilot program called CREW. CREW stands for *Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace*. CREW is a national initiative based on the all-employee survey findings and hundreds of personal interviews with VHA staff, contributing to the larger goal of cultural health in VHA.

CREW was created because employees throughout VHA have reported that VHA does not exhibit a consistently respectful work environment. This program has been piloted throughout VHA with amazing results. Along with six other facilities, our VAMC was selected to participate in the third CREW pilot.

During the month of April, Bldg. 403B staff completed an anonymous CREW online survey. This will be followed by initial conversations, training, and activities facilitated by Karen Rezin, RN, and Russ O’Neil, NA.

So what does *Civility, Respect, and Engagement* mean?

Civility is an essential behavior of all employees in all organizations. These are the interpersonal “rules of engagement” for how we relate to each other, our patients, and our stakeholders; the fundamentals of courtesy, politeness, and consideration.

Respect connects us at a personal level. It reflects an attitude developed from deep listening and understanding, cultural and personal sensitivity, and compassion. It honors all the participants in an interaction by creating a safe place to have difficult conversations and leads to an environment of honesty and mutual trust.

Engagement is the result of respectful relationships within an atmosphere of trust. It provides all the staff with the charge, the parameters, the training and the support to make decisions “on the spot” in the best interest of the veteran.

The objectives of CREW are:

Raise awareness of the importance of civility and respect among co-workers as well as with customers/patients

Increase understanding of the relationship between civility and successful achievement of VHA’s mission (the business case)

Achieve agreement about what defines “a respectful workplace” in your unit or team

Identify barriers or bad habits that get in the way of achieving a respectful workplace

Instill commitment to the common goal of “raising the bar” for acceptable behavior in the workplace.

NETWORK AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Hines Employee Featured in Time Magazine

The May 15th on-line edition of *Time Magazine* featured an article about Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans and their job search. Hines employee David Hansberger, was featured in the following passage of the article about an OIF veteran struggling to get a job.

“Last December, the job hunt broke him (the veteran) down. “The stress factor here is real different,” he says. “There, I was worried about the dying, but that was it. They give you a plan and you do it. Here at home I have so many more things to worry about.” He was admitted to the VA hospital in Hines, Ill., and treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. A psychiatrist there introduced him to David Hansberger, who was hired by the VA to procure, among other things, jobs for area veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Hansberger showed Hughes how to use the Web to apply for jobs. He helped Hughes post a résumé online and set up an e-mail address. He called Hughes three times a week for updates. He drove Hughes to the Military.com job fair, the first Hughes ever attended.”

The *Time* article in its entirety can be found at the following link:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1620983,00.html>

Congratulations is extended to David for his hard work in assisting this veteran and all other veterans in their employment needs. Thanks to David’s hard work, this veteran did find employment and is very grateful for all the assistance he received.

Hines Shines in Federal Employee of the Year Competition

Hines stood out at the May 2007 Chicago area Federal Employee of the Year Award luncheon; with more than

thirty award nominees, one winner, one finalist and a group finalist award. **Gerald Schutter**, Chief of the Hines Blind Center, was a winner in the Supervisory Employee category. **Annette Katamay** was a finalist in the Program Specialist Award Category and the Hines Operation Iraqi Freedom Outreach team of **Pat Moss, Dr. Chirag Raval, Sue Smallheiser, Ivy Bryant, Joe Rio, Maureen Dyman** and **Dr. Monica Steiner** was named a finalist in the group competition.

Other nominees from Hines included Aerron Belle, Maggie Grimmage, Joseph Mack Jelinek, Pamela Shanahan, RN, Deloris Murrell, NA, Kathleen Harms, Charles Neely, Gerald A. Schutter, Nancy Berard, Annette H. Katamay, Myrna I. Laureano, Gloria Huffman, J. D. Branch, Beata Kogut, and Samuel Janusauskas, along with the Hines Polytrauma Team of Melanie Querbin, MD, Debbie Johnson, OTR, Amanda Urban, PhD, Joanne Milas, CTRS, Ron Balogh, CPO, David Labash, CRRN, Amanda Sobel, LSW, Emily Garza, PT, Denise VanKoevering, COMS, Laura Kulawiak, Speech and Audiology.

There are more than 100,000 federal employees in the Chicagoland area and Hines stood out as the organization with the most finalists. The luncheon was held downtown at the Hyatt Regency, with more than 1100 attendees. Congratulations to all the hardworking dedicated Hines employees who were nominated for the awards and recognized at the luncheon.

North Chicago VAMC Physician Receives the 2007 James B. Hammond Humanitarian Award



Dr. Ashok Fulambarker received 2007 James B. Hammond Humanitarian Award at the Department of Medicine annual retreat. This award recognizes an individual who has exhibited humanitarianism for the community or the world. Dr. Fulambarker

has been involved in the community service here in the US and in India. As a chest physician at the North Chicago VAMC, he has provided compassionate care to the veterans for 27 years. As an active member of the executive committee of the Indian American Medical Association and the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, he has provided valuable service to the Indian community. He is also the recipient of the Governor's service community award of the Chest Foundation for his community work project for "Love Humanity International."

North Chicago Physicians Collaborate to Publish Articles

Drs. Chagares and Yong, in collaboration with three past podiatry residents of North Chicago VAMC had an article published in the March/April 2007 printing of the Journal Of The American Podiatric Medical Association. The article, listed under the "Clinically Speaking" portion of the Journal is entitled "Neurilemoma of the Posterior Tibial Nerve and Tarsal Tunnel Syndrome."

Tarsal Tunnel Syndrome is a fairly common nerve entrapment condition affecting the ankle and foot. A neurilemoma is an uncommon, benign, encapsulated growth. The article was a case report involving this rare space-occupying lesion occurring at VAMC North Chicago. Additionally, Drs. Chagares and Yong, in collaboration with another set of two past podiatry residents of North Chicago VAMC, had an article published in the September/October 2006 printing of the same Journal [JAPMA]. The article, also listed under the "Clinically Speaking" portion of the Journal Of The American Podiatric Medical Association, was entitled "Epidermal Inclusion Cyst in the Foot of a Vietnam Veteran." Epidermal inclusion cysts are soft tissue masses that result from traumatic implantation of viable skin surface cells into deeper tissue layers. The veteran patient at North Chicago VAMC received the trauma as a result of stepping on a punji stake while serving in Vietnam. Careful excision of the lesion is imperative to prevent recurrence.

Lizer Named Nurse of the Year by Regional Newspaper

Shannon Lizer, a part-time nurse practitioner at the Freeport Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), has been named Nurse of the Year by the Rockford (Illinois) *Register Star* newspaper. The *Register Star* is a major daily newspaper that covers a substantial area including north-central and north-west Illinois. She is also the Director of Nursing at Highland Community College in Freeport and is a teacher for the University of Illinois at Chicago – Rockford Regional Campus. She is very active in numerous professional organizations as well. Lizer recently had her 30-year anniversary as a registered nurse.

Dr. Marie Heimerdinger of the Freeport CBOC is very familiar with Lizer and has also served with her at a local indigent clinic. “Shannon is an incredible asset. She is a talented educator for patients and co-workers. Her knowledge base is strong and she will refer to the literature if she has questions. She is very compassionate and truly cares about the welfare of her patients,” Heimerdinger said.

Hoover Honored by Madison Federal Agency Association

Linda Hoover, claims section supervisor at VA Madison, has been named the federal administrative employee of the year by the Greater Madison Federal Agency Association at their annual recognition luncheon. Hoover was cited for her exemplary leadership, working with a wide variety of VA Offices and external customers to expedite the identification of issues that are due to injuries or illnesses related to military service. Hoover does an outstanding job of working with hospital staff on completing Compensation & Pension exams in an average of 17 days, well below the national goal of 35 days, with a quality score of 97%, exceeding the goal of 78% as well as coordinating urgent exams while monitoring quality and performance data. She continually demonstrates high energy and enthusiasm in her efforts, always impressing others with her work ethic and her commitment to the VA. She understands veterans, their needs and is dedicated to helping them.

Recognized by ACHE on Healthcare Leadership

Stan Johnson, Medical Center Director, and Justin Sivill, Tomah VA Health Administration Trainee, were recently recognized at the 2007 American College of Health Care Executives (ACHE) 50th Annual Congress on Healthcare Leadership. This award is presented to one preceptor each year and competition is among over 40 preceptors.

Mr. Johnson receives the Graduate Healthcare Administration Training Program, Annual Preceptor Award from Jonathan H. Gardner, Chairman of the Graduate Healthcare Administration Training Program Board.



Mr. Gardner remarked that all five of the residents who have trained under Mr. Johnson have remained in the VA system, a compliment to the experience they had at Tomah VAMC. Sivill received the first place award in the 2007 Annual Poster Competition for the Graduate Healthcare Administration Training Program (GHATP). He competed with 45 other Administrative Residents/Fellows from across the US. His poster presentation was, "Using Advanced Clinic Access Principles for Outpatient Pharmacy Telephone Services: From Worst to Best in VISN 12 in Four Months."

Wisconsin Health Care Employee Pride Program

Jeanne Dimeck was selected as one of the honorees for the 2007 Wisconsin Health Care Employee Pride Program. Ms. Dimeck was one of 67 honorees at the event that occurred on April 26 at the Kalahari in the Wisconsin Dells. She joined Tomah VAMC in February and is a Certified Nursing Assistant on the “Home Sweet Home” unit (Building 406A). This program is sponsored

by the Wisconsin Hospital Association in collaboration with the Wisconsin Society of Healthcare Human Resources Administration, Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives, and the Wisconsin Healthcare Public Relations and Marketing Society.

Purple Heart Recipient



Hines Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) staff recently coordinated a ceremony to honor the distinguished military service of a very special patient, Mr. Kapsalis, who served in the Army in Vietnam. For many years, Mr. Kapsalis has waited to receive this

honor. His family, along with numerous Hines employees, were present for this very special and emotional ceremony.

Pat Moss, Associate Chief Nurse at Hines VA hospital, donned her Air Force military uniform to present Mr. Thomas S. Kapsalis with a purple heart.



To mark this very special occasion, Sue Biggins, SCI Clinical Nurse Manager, along with Spinal Cord Injury staff, planned a ceremony, complete with a proclamation, medal pinning, and of course, refreshments.

Annual Volunteer Awards Ceremonies

Jesse Brown VAMC held its annual volunteer awards ceremony on April 14 at the Brookfield Zoo. Guests even had the opportunity to pet a llama which was brought to the door where the reception was being held. Last year, a total of 541 volunteers donated over 91,000 hours of service to JBVAMC, including Sisco Harley, a member of the Blinded Veterans Association, who was honored by Marie James, Chief, Voluntary Service, for his lifetime achievement of 17,500 hours of service, and Anna May Mann, American Legion Auxiliary, who was presented with the 12,500-hour award by Associate Director Michelle Blakely.



Marie James, Chief Voluntary Service, Jesse Brown VAMC and Sisco Harley.



Anna May Mann, and Michelle Blakely, Associate Director, Jesse Brown VAMC.

Madison volunteer recognition activities provide a formal way of saying thanks to all volunteers for their dedicated service to our veterans. Akira Toki was the highest award recipient honored at VA Madison's Annual Volunteer Recognition luncheon with the presentation of a mantle clock for 22,500 hours of service. Toki serves three days a week as the Military Order of the Purple Heart representative and as the Patient Craft Program Coordinator. He has served as a volunteer at the facility since it opened in 1951.

From Left, Allen Ackers, Acting Director, Mary Toki (Akira's Wife), Akira Toki, John Rohrer, Acting Associate Director.



National Volunteer Week was celebrated at the **Tomah** VA the week of April 15 – 21. The Tomah VA has about 400 volunteers who serve about 3200 hours each month.

Volunteers enjoyed a breakfast on Tuesday, which was prepared by the Tomah VA's Nutrition and Food Service staff and served by members of the VAVS Staff Advisory Committee and other employees. Jean Calhoun, Music Therapist, strummed on her harp and set a sophisticated and relaxing tone for the meal.

The annual awards program was held on Thursday. The guest speaker was Tom Thibodeau, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Viterbo University. His time at the podium literally flew by as he told stories and offered insights to make the audience laugh and cry, all the while conveying the importance of serving others.

Special awards were given to the volunteer drivers of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Transportation Network, recognizing the volunteers for their outstanding dependability over the years and their remarkable service to veterans in need.

Cindy Gluch, DAV Transportation Coordinator, received the highest VAVS Award this year – 10,000 hours!! She was also named the Tomah VA's "Friend of the Volunteer," which is an annual award honoring a staff person who works well with volunteers.

April 16 – April 21 was National Volunteer Week and the **North Chicago** VA Volunteers were honored on April 12th at the Country Squire Restaurant in Grayslake, where over three hundred volunteers, guests and staff were in attendance at the 2007 Annual Volunteer Awards Program. The program featured Caroline Sheaffer and the Jazz Pazzazz who entertained the audience with songs from the swing era.

The volunteers were honored with awards for their many hours of devotion and dedication to our veterans. Acclaiming top honors was Richard Kutz, McHenry,



(pictured above left), who received a 17,500 hour outstanding service plate.

Other prestigious VAVS awards followed with Floyd Eubanks, Waukegan, who received a 15,000 hour outstanding service medallion; Michael Hiley, Zion, and Irene Paja, Lincolnshire, both received a 7,500 hour plaque and Richard Eirich, Arlington Heights, received a 5,000 hour appreciation award. Also, a 4,000 hour

Presidential Award from President Bush's initiative encouraging all Americans to serve volunteer hours to community and country was presented to Jim Duddy of Spring Grove. Other volunteer awards ranged from 3,750 hours to 50 hours.

The National theme "Volunteers Inspire by Example" couldn't be truer of our VA volunteers. Congratulations and a special thank you to each and every volunteer for your service to our Nation's veterans.

CARES Update

Jesse Brown VAMC has relocated its Beverly Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) to the Auburn Gresham community on Chicago's south side to improve access to care for the 63,000 veterans who live in that area. The clinic is located at 7731 S. Halsted Street, adjacent to the new St. Leo's transitional housing center.

The first floor of the CBOC provides primary medical care, diabetes education, podiatry and mental health services, including addictions treatment. The second floor houses a job counseling and training center, with a computer lab, along with a Veterans Resource Center and offices for the Veterans Benefits Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor. The CBOC is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A dedication to officially open the new CBOC was held following a Blessing Ceremony conducted by Catholic Charities in the new Veterans Garden located next to the St. Leo's Residence on May 18. Before cutting the ribbon to officially open the Auburn Gresham Clinic, JBVAMC Medical Center Director James Jones said the new facility would help VA reach out to those veterans who most need assistance. "We are especially excited by what this clinic will mean for the thousands of homeless veterans who live in Chicago," Mr. Jones said. "Through VA's partnership with Catholic Charities and the opening of the St. Leo's Transitional Residence, we have an opportunity to reach out to those who once served our country but now live on our streets. Through this clinic, veterans residing at St. Leo's will have access

to medical care, mental health services and other specialty programs. They will also have the opportunity to learn new vocational skills, including computer training, making them eligible for new employment opportunities, all that will help them regain their independence."

VA Secretary R. James Nicholson, VISN 12 Network Director



James Roseborough and JBVAMC Director James S. Jones (from left) provided ribbon-cutting honors to officially open the new Auburn Gresham Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

The opening of the Auburn Gresham Clinic and St. Leo Residence is part of a pilot for the U.S. President's faith-based and community initiative program. St. Leo's is owned and operated by the Archdiocese of the City of Chicago Catholic Charities and provides 141 adult veterans with private studio apartments, each with its own kitchen and full bathroom. The Center provides supportive services and counseling with the goal of self-sufficiency and requires each veteran to seek/obtain/maintain employment.

Former VISN 12 Network Director Joan Cummings, MD, who initiated planning sessions with Catholic Charities in 2003 that led to the openings of St. Leo's and the Auburn Gresham Clinic, was presented with an award by Father Michael Boland during a ceremony held by Catholic Charities to bless the new Veteran's Garden adjacent to the St. Leo's Residence.



Former VISN 12 Network Director, Dr. Cummings is congratulated by Secretary Nicholson after receiving her plaque.

Farewell and Welcome

Network Director VISN 19 Appointed



Director Glen W. Grippen is leaving Milwaukee for the “Mile High City” to be the new network director of VISN 19 the Rocky Mountain Network. “It is an opportunity to serve more veterans,” he

said. Mr. Grippen has been the leader of Milwaukee’s VA Medical Center for ten years. As he looks at his new position, he sees the big picture: “At the network director level, I will have the responsibility to coordinate the care for veterans in nine states. I will be able to positively impact the lives of more veterans and their families.”

Mr Grippen brings to his new position 35 years of VA experience that includes 12 positions of increasing complexity and responsibility. All that will come into play as he integrates health programs within the different states.

He will miss Milwaukee, (his hometown), the veterans, volunteers and the staff. He is proud of building a culture

where the veteran comes first and his success is reflected in patient smiles and satisfaction survey numbers. “I will miss the daily contact with the patients.” He made it a point to have his door open to listen to patients and staff. In leaving, he is thankful for the support he has received from so many. Mr. Grippen knows that running a Medical Center is not done by oneself and is grateful for the contributions made to serve the veterans.

Stan Johnson Appointed Director of VA Medical Center Seattle

Stan Johnson, Medical Center Director at the Tomah VA, has been selected as the Director of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, Washington effective July 8, 2007.



Mr. Johnson reported to VA Puget Sound on a “detail” on May 29 until his official appointment begins. Jerry Molnar, Associate Medical Center Director, has been appointed the Tomah facility’s Acting Medical Center Director.

In his announcement to VA Tomah staff, Johnson wrote, “I want all of you to know I am so proud of the accomplishments we have made during my tenure as Director at Tomah. Together we have made many positive changes and met challenges to continually improve the health care provided to our nation’s veterans. You should all be proud! Tomah VA has been ranked in the top 10 VA Medical Centers for two consecutive years and currently ranks third because of your continued efforts to address access to care, quality of care, and patient satisfaction.”

Mr. Johnson has been the Director at the Tomah VA since August 21, 1994. He served as the Acting Director at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center for eight months in 2005.

Transition Patient Advocates

VISN 12 is proud to introduce its newest public service employees

Transition Patient Advocates (TPA)



Darlene DeMario
North Chicago VAMC

VISN facilities across the country are continually seeking ways to improve services to returning OIF/OEF soldiers and veterans. With the instatement of new VA TPA's, area VA facilities are able to do just that. Based on the population of returning OIF/OEF soldiers to the VISN 12 catchment area, a total of seven TPA's were assigned to area facilities to assist with providing support and guidance to patients transitioning from the military into the VA system. Acting as a liaison on behalf of service members and their families, TPA's work closely with Combat Case Managers and Regional Office Representatives, coordinating all aspects of care and benefits, ensuring service member's transition from military is smooth and hassle free.



Lela Vance-Glover
Jesse Brown VAMC



Carmen Hatch
Hines VA Hospital



Jeanne Button
Tomah / Madison VAMC



Will Johnson
Milwaukee VAMC



Cristine Mabrito
Hines VA Hospital



David Flynn
Iron Mountain VAMC

VA Madison Welcomes New Director

She's Back! Deborah A. Thompson has been named the Director of the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital of Madison effective June 10, 2007.

Most recently Thompson served as the Director of the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System. Previously she served as Director of the Iron Mountain (Mich.) VAMC, Associate Director of VA Madison, Associate Director for Operations at the Black Hills Health Care System (S.D.), Associate Director for the Hot Springs (S.D.) VAMC, after completing her Associate Director Training Program at the Portland (Ore.) VAMC and in positions of increasing responsibility at Denver (Colo.) and Indianapolis (Ind.).

Originally from Missouri, Thompson holds a bachelor's degree and master's of library science from the University of Missouri. She earned a master's degree in business administration from the University of Phoenix in 1991. Prior to working for VA, she was a medical librarian for the University of Missouri Medical School in Kansas City, Purdue University and the Indiana University School of Medicine. She also worked in Air Force base libraries in Hawaii and Mississippi.

Thompson has been recognized many times for her outstanding performance by the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Senate Confirms Dr. Kussman as Under Secretary For Health

WASHINGTON -- On May 25, 2007, the United States Senate confirmed Dr. Michael J. Kussman as Under Secretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I am extremely honored that the Senate has approved my nomination. I am proud to be given the opportunity to lead VA's dedicated health care workers in serving our nation's veterans," Dr. Kussman said.

Dr. Kussman joined VHA in 2000 following a distinguished, quarter-century career in the U.S. Army in which he served as commander of the Europe Regional Medical Command and command surgeon for U.S. Army in Europe. As commander of the Walter Reed Army Health Care System in Washington, he received the rank of Brigadier General.

With VA, he served in a number of progressively responsible positions, including Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health. At the time of his confirmation, he held the title of Acting Under Secretary for Health.

At his confirmation hearing May 16 before the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Dr. Kussman said that with proper resources VHA is prepared to "set the benchmark for quality care for the Nation and the world. He told members of the Senate Committee "VA has no more important mission than to restore those who have been injured or made ill as a result of their service in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan to their fullest level of functioning.'

"I accept responsibility for VHA's readiness to provide these heroes with the level of care they have earned through their service and the services they have made in defense of our freedom," Dr. Kussman testified. "That is why I am here."

He said VHA is dedicated to meeting new challenges that have developed in caring for veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

“We continue to learn what world-class care means to this new generation of service members and veterans – and to their families,” Dr. Kussman said. “Their expectations have raised the bar to our success, and we must continue to improve in order to meet those expectations.”



Dr. Kussman officially sworn in as Under Secretary for Health, May 30th, 2007.

He noted that challenges VA faces include:

- Improving collaboration with the Department of Defense;
 - Searching for the most effective therapies for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and ensuring those therapies are quickly distributed throughout the veterans' health care system;
 - Training VA health care professionals to recognize and care for patients with traumatic brain injury;
 - Improving access for all enrolled veterans, from the oldest to the newest;
 - Meeting the goal of the President's New Freedom Commission on mental health to emphasize recovery, not stabilization, for every mentally ill veteran.
- Dr. Kussman emphasized the four priorities he has established to help VHA meet today's challenges:
- Responsible, accountable, demonstrated leadership;
 - Patient care, education, research and emergency management – patient care is by far the most important;
 - The quality of VA's business processes must match the quality of its care;

Ensuring that while measuring performance, we are measuring the right things.

“I promise to work with you and all members of Congress to build a health care system that will meet the needs of all veterans and their families –the men and women it is VHA's privilege and our honor to serve,” Dr. Kussman told the Committee. “I am truly fortunate to have been chosen to carry the standard for this great organization.”

27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games Update

The 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games hosted by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America occurred on June 19-23, 2007. Many of the events were at the Midwest Airlines Center in downtown Milwaukee. All of the 17 core and 2 exhibition competitions were free and open to the public.

One of the interesting facets of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games was the willingness of the athletes to try something new. Each year, new sports are introduced, first as exhibition events, and then possibly added as regular competition. This year, Milwaukee saw a first – wheelchair curling debuted as an exhibition sport.

While curling is a sport growing in popularity worldwide, wheelchair curling only recently received full medal status at the 2006 Paralympics. Local organizer Steve Brown couldn't wait for the 40 athletes who registered to play at the Games to try their skill on the ice. “Curling isn't just about



strength. It's a combination of feel, touch, eye and hand coordination, finesse and strategy. It's like a big game of chess on the ice. All of these attributes make curling perfect for people of varying ages and athleticism. It is a

life-long sport and women can compete as well as men. What's best is it's every-one's chance to participate in an Olympic sport."

Wheelchair curling competition took place on Saturday, June 23 (the final day of the Games) at the Pettit National Ice Center, a United States Olympic training venue on Milwaukee's west side. For those unfamiliar with curling, two teams, with four members each, launch a 40-pound stone with a delivery stick down the ice towards a bull's-eye 125 feet away. Opposing teams take turns launching their stones, trying to knock the opponent's stone farther from the bull's-eye. In the end, the team earns a point for each stone that is closer to the center than the opponents. There are six "ends" (similar to baseball innings) in curling and the winner is the team with the most points at the finish.



Yes, the wheelchair version is a little different from traditional curling in that there are a few modifications. The stones are delivered with the wheelchair locked in a stationary position by a second curler and there are no "sweepers" on the ice – the team members who you may have seen with brooms that help direct the stone to the bull's-eye. This makes accuracy and strategy even more important in the wheelchair version. Brown points out, "Given equal ability, the team with the better strategy will always win out." So wheelchair curling may be an ideal sport for those with more brains than brute strength. While some countries have advanced quickly to the point of specialized wheelchairs, the United States is still using standard wheelchairs. Before taking the ice, the tires

have to be scrupulously cleaned so that no debris makes it way onto the competition surface.

Brown and United States Paralympic coordinator Marc DePurno of Utica, New York hope that by offering veterans the opportunity to experience curling, they will pursue it recreationally in their own communities and encourage other wheelchair athletes to do the same. But they also have an ulterior and very exciting motive – to find and develop future members of the United States Wheelchair Curling Team who will participate in international competition.

Volunteers Made it Happen

It was only natural to focus on the remarkable athletes when you attended the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Milwaukee, the unsung heroes – were the more than 2,700 volunteers – without whom, the Games could not have taken place.

The task of recruiting and coordinating the volunteers fell to chief of voluntary service, Denise Jashinsky, and a recruit from performance improvement, Bruce Chmielewski, who, like many of their co-workers at the Clement J. Zablocki Medical Center, added this duty to their already existing workload. After observing the volunteer coordination at the Minneapolis Games in 2005, Jashinsky and Chmielewski decided to computerize all steps of the volunteer process. This led to an innovative idea and a first for the Games – anyone interested in volunteering could sign up immediately on line. "The option of signing up on line gave people the chance to commit to being a part of the Games while they were excited about how much fun the Games would be," said Jashinsky. "I am sure our volunteer group is the largest it has ever been because it so easy to just say 'yes' to signing up."

Active recruiting started in January, and between the on-line sign up and the support from the community, the response has been overwhelming. Chmielewski added, "We know the people of Milwaukee and Wisconsin are very generous and giving, but we were amazed at the way people responded with open arms to our appeal for volunteers. As would be expected the veterans organizations led the way. We have support from large

corporations, churches, schools and other nonprofit groups as well as individuals. The large groups were encouraged to 'adopt a venue' as this allowed friends to stay together and have more fun volunteering. It also gave them a single place to direct their volunteers. Denise and I just wanted to simplify the whole process."

To ensure that the volunteers understood their responsibilities and were still willing to work, everyone who signed up received a follow-up call to confirm their participation and a letter of thanks prior to the Games.

Who could volunteer? The easy answer was anyone. The oldest volunteer was 96 years old and the youngest was 8. Anyone under 12 needed a parent accompanying them, but the experience was sure to make a positive impression on the youngest volunteers, so Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops and school groups were encouraged to sign up.

Jashinsky and Chmielewski were proud to be a part of the Games at Milwaukee and especially of the generosity of the community. "One of the things that we hoped would happen is that the people who volunteer for the Games would be inspired to continue serving our veterans and think about volunteering at the Medical Center," stated Jashinsky. "After all, volunteering is one of those rare activities where even though you don't get paid in money, you are richer for just taking part."

Torch passes to Omaha

A standing room crowd of over 1,300 watched as the torch was passed on Saturday night (June 23) at the Closing Ceremonies of the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games at the Midwest Airlines Center in downtown Milwaukee. The torch was presented to representatives of the Omaha VA Medical Center and the Great Plains Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. It was the concluding event of the week-long competition for wheelchair athletes. Omaha, Nebraska was selected to serve as the host city for the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in July 2008.



Al Washko (Left), director VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and Mark Lindquist, president of Great Plains Paralyzed Veterans of America, accept the torch from Phil Rosenberg, president of the Wisconsin Paralyzed of America and Glen Grippen, director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Glen Grippen, medical center director of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, passed the torch to his counterpart, Al Washko, from Omaha, during the ceremony. He was effusive in his praise for the support provided to the wheelchair athletes who participated in the Games. "The Great Games on a Great Lake were truly GREAT!" He was appreciative of the hard work and sacrifices made to significantly enrich the lives of the 513 veteran athletes and their families who attended.

Grippen was overwhelmed with the community, volunteer, media and corporate support. "Their generosity was essential, and volunteers were everywhere from the airport to the tray line. We asked the community for 2,500 volunteers and over 4,000 responded. That's impressive." He continued to enumerate the many corporate contributions and in-kind donations. "They all made it happen." Phillip Rosenberg, president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (WPVA), who passed the torch to his counterpart, Mark Lundquist, president of the Great Plains Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, also expressed his gratitude to the thousands of volunteers, numerous local sponsors and to the 33

athletes who were members of the largest team ever fielded by WPVA in the 27-year history of the Games. “We had great weather, great competition, great camaraderie among all the athletes, great volunteers, a great VA Medical Center partner and wonderful sponsors. Without any exaggeration, these Games were the best.” Rosenberg competed in 26 of the 27 Games.

Most of the athletes rolled into Milwaukee on Monday and left with broad smiles on Sunday. “Everything is so convenient,” said an athlete from Arizona staying at one of the downtown hotels. The buses were also a positive. Milwaukee County Transit System buses that “kneel” were used so those in wheelchairs could roll in, making ramps unnecessary. And the weather... it was perfect.

Grippen observed that time and time again, the athletes were heard talking about the friendliness of the city. “It is easy to predict many will return to visit Milwaukee.”

Editor’s note: The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world.

The Games were a joint effort of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and were hosted locally by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and the Wisconsin Chapter of PVA.

Interesting facts about the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games:

- Total number athletes registered – 513
- Farthest - Great Britain (11)
- Closest - Milwaukee (7)
- Oldest athlete - 83 years old
- Youngest athlete - 22 years old
- Number of medals earned – 964

Service Branch: (11 veterans served in multiple branches)

- Army 242
- Navy 111
- Marine Corps 69
- Air Force 77
- Coast Guard 9
- National Guard 5
- British 11

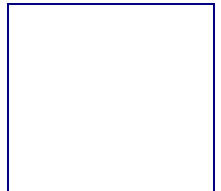
Estimates:

- Number of bottles of water given out - 16,232
- Number of towels used - 3,000
- Number of directional signs made - 860
- Number of NVWG photographers - 44

Combat Service:

- Afghanistan 1
- Iraq 19
- Iraq and Afghanistan 4
- Korea 14
- Gulf War 47
- Vietnam 96
- Vietnam Era 103
- WW II 5
- Other Bosnia, Grenada, Panama, North Sea, Lebanon 8

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