



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

# Vanguard

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1999



## Veterans Day 1999

Nation Honors Contributions of  
20th Century Veterans — page 5

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### On the Cover:

Retired Army General William C. Westmoreland leads Charleston, S.C.'s Veterans Day parade riding in a horse-drawn World War I caisson. At his side is a young boy dressed in a WWI uniform. Westmoreland served as Grand Marshal for Charleston's first Veterans Day parade in nearly 30 years. Charleston VAMC employees were instrumental in reviving the tradition.

### Vanguard

VA's Employee Magazine  
November/December 1999  
Vol. XLV, No. 9  
Printed on 50% recycled paper

Editor: Lisa Respass  
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Published by the  
Office of Public Affairs (80D)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20420  
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[www.va.gov/pubaff/OPAIndex.htm](http://www.va.gov/pubaff/OPAIndex.htm)

# INTRODUCING

Walter Houser

The World Wide Web is here to stay, and yet for some, navigating the wwws and dot.coms of today's information superhighway can seem like a daunting task. Fortunately, for VACO Webmaster Walter Houser, harnessing the power of the Internet to advance the VA mission means making it easier for employees, veterans and the public to use.

Houser says *www.va.gov* has come to be considered the definitive source for information on VA benefits, policies and programs. "This is a One VA product," he said. "The Web allows us all to work together and connect all of our contributions to resolve inconsistencies that have plagued us in the past."

Although some credit him with laying the foundation on which the current VA Web site is built, Houser is quick to point out that others played equally important roles. "I got into this in 1994 after talking with Dan Maloney (director of Emerging Technologies in the Veterans Health Administration)," said Houser. "After attending a White House demonstration of the World Wide Web, Dan and his colleague Charles Leahey set up the software and established the connections. When I saw their work, I was blown away and we have been partners ever since."

Houser joined VA in 1987 as a computer specialist working on Information Technology policies and became involved in the Department's efforts to create an infrastructure allowing VA to establish a presence on the World Wide Web. "I was kind of like a Johnny Appleseed of the 90s, installing software and showing people how to use it," said Houser. "I taught people how to make Web pages and gave them assistance.

There are now Webmasters at VBA, VHA and NCA — we have Webmasters all over the Department."

The collective effort paid off — there are currently more than 200,000 documents on the VA Web site. Visitors to the site can find comprehensive information on a variety of VA benefits and programs, including downloadable VA forms, the Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents manual, decisions by the Board of Veterans' Appeals, locations of VA offices worldwide, records of VA-funded research programs and news of upcoming special events.

Information can be found on the VA Web site 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from any location in the world. And according to Houser, most VA managers have come to see the importance of Web technology. "We try to be very cooperative so everyone can get their material on the Web...and many

program offices have participated, but some with vital services for veterans have not," he explained.

As the World Wide Web continues to evolve, the VA Web site will also change. A Veteran-Focused Internet Redesign Project is underway to enhance the Web site's content, organization and functionality. Emerging technologies are allowing those who never imagined the possibility of going on-line an opportunity to do just that. Houser points to VA statistics showing there are more than 100,000 veterans with some type of visual impairment and 481 visually-challenged VA employees as his inspiration for wanting to improve accessibility to the VA Web site. □

By Matt Bristol



Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite,  
Acting Under Secretary  
for Health

## VA Health Care System Will Stay on the Road to Improvement



We in VHA have been through a lot these past few years — flat-line budgets, reorganizations, staffing changes. We've been guided by our

"Vision for Change" and it is important that you know that our restructuring has not been arbitrary or temporary. It is based on a firm belief that health care not only should be better, but that VA can make it better. And we have. The facts back this up, and the veterans we serve say so.

A recent national survey of veterans commissioned by the National Partnership for Reinventing Government reported that veterans who use VA health care are increasingly satisfied with it and that they are

far more inclined to continue using their health care provider (VA) than non-VA patients in private hospitals. The survey recorded a significantly higher overall satisfaction rating for VA than that given private hospitals.

The facts back up patient confidence in VA.

We are no longer a fragmented system of hospitals and clinics. The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) is our system's basic operating unit with 1,100 sites of care delivery organized into those 22 networks.

In 1994, ten percent of our patients were enrolled in primary care. Today, all VA medical centers have implemented primary care, as well as universal telephone triage "call centers." We have implemented universal pre-admission screening, admission and discharge planning. Since 1994, VA annual inpatient admissions have decreased 32

percent while ambulatory care visits increased 35 percent. Ambulatory surgeries now account for almost 70 percent of all surgery done in VA — a figure twice that of 1995.

Since March 1995, we approved 302 community-based outpatient clinics, 225 of which are open for business with 77 coming on line. The average JCAHO hospital accreditation score for VA last year was 94 compared to 92 for the private sector.

The vision is becoming reality. Thanks to you, VA health care is getting better.

The flat-line budget we inherited from years of federal deficit has given way to a realization by our government that quality health care for veterans must be supported by reasonable allocation of resources. The recently-approved FY2000 VA budget gives us the flexibility we need to continue transforming our

*Much work lies ahead as we weave many initiatives and new programs into an accessible network of services.*

health care system without resorting to widespread reductions in force or other drastic measures that create uncertainty and turmoil amongst staff. We will continue to evolve our system, but most adjustments will be made rationally and humanely through attrition, retirement and recently approved buyout authority.

Change is as difficult to manage from the top of the organization as it is to implement locally at the hospital or clinic. Communication is central to managing and coping with change and it is of strategic importance in VHA's transformation plans. It's not hard to go out and tell people things or get others to present information. The hardest part of communication is to get people to actually listen; to take the time to listen and hear the message behind what is being said and incorporate that into their thought processes.

My goal is to encourage listening

throughout VA. Our VHA Management Assistance Councils are providing management more "listening power." We are making other commitments to listening through active union partnership, stakeholder meetings, town hall meetings and Congressional briefings. Our participation in One-VA conferences and local initiatives means we're listening more to fellow VA employees outside of the health care arena.

It's hard to over-communicate during times of change and we in VA work in environments — government and health care — that will be defined by change for the foreseeable future. The challenge is to communicate with each other in ways that focus on constructively meeting the challenge of change while reducing the personal uneasiness and turmoil change can induce.

We've come a long way in a short time and we've done it under budget constraint. The vision is not complete. It may

never be. But we are on the right track and major obstacles lie behind. Much work lies ahead as we weave many initiatives and new programs into an accessible network of services. Patient safety, pain management, waiting time improvement, enrollment, CBOCs, hepatitis C, the Veterans Millennium Health Care Act — these are only a few of many challenges we face this coming year. But implementing these initiatives is the "fun" part of change; making changes we know will improve the way we work rather than reacting to changes from outside over which we have little or no control.

I thank you for the outstanding achievements and accomplishments we have all been part of for the past six years. I look forward to working with and listening to you as we continue to change and improve veterans health care during the coming year. □

# VA Finalizes Y2K Rollover Preparations

**W**hen the new century dawns on January 1, disability checks will keep going to veterans, health-care services in VA facilities will continue without interruption, and the processing of claims for veterans benefits will go on without glitches.

"We are ready for Y2K at VA, and we expect no problems," Secretary Togo D. West, Jr. announced recently. "We have tested everything we can control. For those things that we cannot control, we will continue working to identify potential problems."

The many months of hard work by VA's Y2K readiness staff to get the Department to this point earned high praise from Rep. Terry Everett (R-Ala.), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. He said VA had met the Y2K readiness challenge "most impressively. It is my opinion, considering the fact that VA has the second largest number of employees and the complexity of its mission, that VA leads all federal agencies in being prepared for Y2K.

"I think veterans can breathe a lot easier about receiving their benefits on time and getting safe health care, using lifesaving medical devices that will not fail them, and not being deprived of prescriptions and medical supplies that they need in their daily lives."

On the benefits side, VA's Year 2000 simulation conducted over the July 4 weekend went off without a hitch — \$3.5 billion in mock payments were processed as the clocks were rolled forward to create a simulated January 2000 payment cycle.

On the health care front, staff continued the effort to identify and fix problems with medical equipment, and developed and tested contingency plans to deal with any unforeseen Y2K-related glitches. VA health care facilities have tested all independent and integrated electronic systems, and all VAMCs have conducted an emergency power drill to demonstrate their abilities to operate on emergency power in case of a power outage at local utility companies.

But the preparedness won't stop

on New Year's Eve. VA medical centers will have extra staff on duty, and will establish Emergency Operations Centers that will be able to quickly respond to any difficulties. Staff at VAROs and health-care facilities that would not normally be open on weekends or holidays will be on-call to deal with potential emergencies.

At the national level, program experts from VA Central Office will operate a Year 2000 Information Coordination Center (ICC) at the Martinsburg, W.Va., VA Medical Center on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 to monitor the Y2K date rollover. All VA facilities will be required to report their Y2K status to ICC staff. VHA and VBA also will operate separate ICCs in coordination with VA's ICC, to be located at the Martinsburg VAMC and VA Central Office, respectively.

Employees who are not involved in Y2K rollover operations are free to ring in the new year with family and

friends, and report for duty as usual on January 3 unless otherwise notified.

And VA payroll staff are reassuring employees that there will be no disruptions in pay. All Y2K modifications to the payroll system have been made and extensively tested. Transmissions to the Department of Treasury and other agencies also have been tested to ensure that direct deposits and checks will be on time and accurate.

The timing of the two payday that fall near the date rollover period lessen the likelihood of problems even further. Electronic pay for the December 28 official payday will arrive on December 23, and on January 7 for the January 11 official payday. Employees may want to check with their financial institutions to ensure their Y2K readiness, but most are already touting their preparedness through newspaper ads, Web sites and brochures mailed with account statements. □

## VA is Y2K Ready, But Are You?

It's unlikely that the Y2K issue will cause any significant problems in the United States, but no one can be sure that there won't be at least temporary disruptions in some services. With that in mind, agencies such as the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are recommending that citizens make some basic preparations. These agencies liken the potential problems to those we might experience during a strong storm. Here are some steps you can take to get ready:

- ✓ Make sure you have at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food, water, and prescription and non-prescription medications.
- ✓ Have extra blankets, coats, hats and gloves to keep warm in case of a power failure. Plan to use only alternative heating devices that are approved for indoor use.
- ✓ Stock up on flashlights and batteries, and make sure you have a battery-operated radio and a first aid kit.
- ✓ Have alternative cooking devices available, such as grills and camp stoves.
- ✓ Have extra cash on hand in case there's a disruption in processing electronic transactions. Withdraw money from your bank in small amounts before December 31.
- ✓ Keep your automobile gas tanks above half-full.
- ✓ Make sure all essential electronic equipment around your home is Y2K ready, including personal computers, home security systems or programmable thermostats.

For more information on personal Y2K readiness, try the American Red Cross Web site at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or FEMA's Web site at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov). FEMA also has a special toll-free Y2K information number (1-888-USA-4-Y2K).

## Veterans Day 1999

# Nation Honors Contributions of 20th Century Vets



Audience members listen to President Clinton's remarks during the annual Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

In his remarks at the 46<sup>th</sup> annual Veterans Day national observance at Arlington National Cemetery, President Clinton used the occasion of the last Veterans Day

Wilson proclaimed November 11 a day to honor the country's veterans, Clinton said, no one could have imagined how many times during this century young Americans would be asked to fight and die for freedom

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reflect upon the many sacrifices made by generations of young Americans to preserve the nation's freedom.

For the past eighty years, the nation has celebrated Veterans Day on the anniversary of the Armistice ending World War I — on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month.

But back when President Woodrow

around the world.

Clinton also paid tribute to two World War II veterans: Rhode Island Senator John Chafee, who died recently at age 77; and Captain Earl Fox, a Coast Guard doctor who, at age 80, was the last World War II veteran still on active duty until he retired in mid-November.

At the close of his remarks, Clinton reminded the capacity audience gathered in the amphitheater that the nation must renew its commitment to care for the veterans whose sacrifices he credited with allowing the United States to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a time of relative peace and prosperity.

"In less than two months," he said, "we'll be able to say the conflict and bloodshed that took so many American lives came from another century. So we gather today for the last time in this century to dedicate ourselves to being good stewards of the sacrifice of the veterans of our country." □

## *Charleston VAMC Revives City's Veterans Day Parade*



When Charleston, S.C., VA Medical Center employees planning the center's Veterans Day program asked the veterans they served what was needed to honor veterans, the resounding answer was a parade.

There hadn't been a Veterans Day parade in Charleston for 28 years, and the consensus of the veterans community was that this long-dormant tradition should be given new life. VA staff provided the CPR needed to revive the parade. Mayor Joe Riley gave the organizers full support, as did local military and veterans service organizations.

At precisely 2 p.m. on November 7, 1999, a large Air Force jet transport flew low over downtown Charleston signaling the start of Charleston's "first annual" Veterans Day parade since 1971. More than 70 marching units, including the Citadel Cadet Corps and members of all military service branches, led the way followed by floats of veterans service organizations and local civic groups.

"It was an inspiring sight," said Charleston VAMC Director John Vogel. "The Charleston Exchange Club donated thousands of miniature American flags and the streets were lined with people, young and old, waving flags to honor our veterans."

A highlight of the parade was the Grand Marshal, retired Army General William C. Westmoreland, sitting tall in the seat of a horse-drawn World War I Army caisson provided by the South Carolina Army National Guard. At left, a float recreating the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima passes through a city street. □

# Helping Homeless Veterans is New Miss America's Cause



MICHAEL "DOC" VELASCO

Miss America's visit with homeless veterans at a San Francisco-area stand down in October was a highlight of the four-day event.

**O**n a recent crisp fall morning, newly crowned Miss America Heather Renee French stood at a podium outside the U.S.

Capitol before a gathering of reporters, VA and congressional staff and veterans service organization representatives. She had come there to talk about why she chose the plight of homeless veterans as the cause she would champion during her reign.

Long before she ever dreamed of becoming Miss America, she explained, she became the daughter of a disabled Vietnam veteran. And it was from her father, Ronnie, that she learned to respect the sacrifices made by the men and women who have served their country in uniform. So when the 24-year-old fashion design student from Maysville, Ky., learned that some 250,000 of the nation's veterans are homeless, she knew she wanted to make that issue her platform in the Miss America pageant.

"It has been our motto throughout this country that we never leave our wounded behind — but the reality is we have left them behind," she said of America's homeless

veterans. "They need our help. This is every U.S. citizen's concern. Everyone knows someone who is a veteran — that's what makes this issue so important."

Last summer, after she was crowned Miss Kentucky, French needed help refining her platform for the Miss America pageant, so she contacted staff at the Lexington, Ky., VA Medical Center.

Ronnie French, 52, a Marine Corps veteran who was wounded in combat and now suffers from debilitating rheumatoid arthritis, has been a patient at both the Lexington and Louisville VAMCs. Heather French also

had participated in volunteer activities at the Lexington VAMC in the past.

Public Affairs Officer Judy Rittenhouse, Chief of Voluntary Service Greg Anderson and Public Affairs Specialist Susie McIntosh agreed to meet with French. At that time, Rittenhouse recalled, French knew only that she wanted her platform to be a veterans issue. "Of course, with her dad being a disabled veteran, she had a genuine interest in veterans," Rittenhouse said. "We discussed different issues about veterans and she decided that it was homeless veterans that she wanted to focus on."

They also helped arrange a meeting in VA Central Office between French and VA Homeless Veterans Coordinator Pete Dougherty, who provided national perspective on the issue.

By the time she took the stage in Atlantic City on September 18 before a national television audience, she was ready to start speaking out on the issue. Just the act of mentioning it that one night, she said during the Capitol Hill news conference, made a significant national impact that she hadn't anticipated.

As Miss America 2000, she is traveling about 20,000 miles a month on a speaking tour that will take her



Heather Renee French visits with outpatient Jackie W. Underwood at the Lexington, Ky., VA Medical Center.



*French signs an autograph for Lexington, Ky., VA Medical Center patient James W. Stutts as her father, Ronnie, looks on.*

all over the country. She is expected to visit homeless shelters and participate in a number of VA-sponsored stand downs and other events for homeless veterans as part of her official travel.

Less than two weeks after becoming Miss America, French made her first appearance at a VA-sponsored stand down in the San Francisco area. The Concord, Calif., Vet Center teamed up with the Vietnam Veterans of Diablo Valley to coordinate the East Bay Stand Down, at which approximately 180 homeless veterans and their families received assistance.

Concord Vet Center Team Leader Denver Mills said French's visit was the highlight of the four-day event. "Her presence, concern and commitment were genuine, heartfelt and appreciated by the participants as well as the volunteers," he said. "At the close of the event, she sang the national anthem solo until her voice cracked with emotion. She then asked the participants to sing with her, which they did with such emotion that there was not a dry eye in the camp."

The following week, Rittenhouse and other Lexington VAMC employees pitched in to help with a number of homecoming activities held

throughout the city for the new Miss America. At a reception for patients at the medical center, French and six of her fellow Miss America contestants visited with patients and signed autographs. "She truly displayed concern and compassion for the patients," Rittenhouse said. "It was very emotional for her."

During the Capitol Hill news conference, French said she will press for increased funding for homeless veterans programs. She said she advocates educational and training programs as the keys to getting homeless veterans off the streets permanently. They need transitional housing while they are going through these programs, she added, and she would like to see more corporations offer them job opportunities.

She also hopes that more of the nation's 27 million veterans will step in to help. "I would like to see all of them become involved," French said. "All of them writing letters, getting involved in their issues, finding out how they can help their brothers and sisters who are homeless."

"And I hope that in ten years, I'm not still speaking on behalf of homeless veterans, because I hope that problem is gone, and I can move on to another veterans issue." □

## Priority Group 7 Veterans Assured Treatment in FY2000

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr. announced in September that VA will enroll all honorably discharged veterans who seek VA health care during fiscal year 2000.

His decision ensures continued treatment this year for Priority Group 7 veterans, the lowest in the priority listing that began in 1998 under the nationwide enrollment system. Priority Group 7 veterans are those who do not have service-connected disabilities or are rated as "non-compensable and zero-percent" for service-connected disabilities.

"It is my intention to serve as many veterans as possible under the law and give them access to the full range of services they need," Secretary West said.

His decision affects the nearly 800,000 Priority Group 7 veterans who are expected to enroll for VA health care in FY 2000; an estimated 16 million veterans are potentially eligible to be enrolled in Priority Group 7. Veterans are still being advised to retain private health insurance, since it may cover services such as emergency care that VA does not usually provide.

The enrollment system was established by the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, and requires most veterans to enroll to receive health care at VA medical facilities. Veterans who are not required to enroll are those:

- with a service-connected disability of 50 percent or more;
- seeking care for a service-connected disability;
- discharged from military service for less than one year for a disability that was determined to have been incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, but that VA has not yet rated.

These exempted veterans are still encouraged to enroll to help VA plan more effectively to meet their health-care needs. □

# Finding Hope Where There Was None



Gilbert Baylor, winner in the vocal solo, patriotic category, sings "America the Beautiful."

**F**inding hope. That was the recurring theme at the 1999 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival as veterans from VA medical centers across the country, armed with artistic and musical talent, gathered in October for a week of rehearsals, workshops and inspirational tours of the beautiful landscape in Grand Junction, Colo.

Gilbert Baylor, a veteran from the Greater Los Angeles Health Care System's West Los Angeles medical center, is a perfect example of finding the gift of hope. Following his discharge from the Navy in 1975, Baylor struggled with violent nightmares, flashbacks and other symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). "I began to use drugs and alcohol as a way to deal with my pain," he said.

After a serious breakdown in 1989, Baylor sought treatment at the West Los Angeles VAMC and was admitted to the POST (PTSD Outpatient Services Treatment) program for intensive PTSD treatment. Baylor acknowledges that his most significant therapy has occurred as a result of reconnecting to music. Encouraged by his VA therapist, Baylor

entered the Creative Arts Festival competition in the music division and won first place in the vocal solo, patriotic category.

When he bowed his head at the conclusion of his inspirational rendition of "America the Beautiful," the audience roared to its feet. "This is the first time since I was a child that I've performed in sobriety," Baylor said following the performance. "It's something completely different — something I never thought I could do. I've now got hope where there was none before."

Baylor was not alone — winners of competitions in music, drama, dance and art divisions were invited to showcase the healing power of the arts at the week-long Festival that culminated in the grand finale stage show and art exhibit.

It is difficult to adequately describe the transition the participants go through at this event. The camaraderie and emotional support is simply overwhelming. "The veterans all get a heavy dose of feeling worthwhile and valued, and that is good medicine," said Dr. Jule Moravec, former Chief Network Officer for VA's health care system and co-ecnee, with former film and stage star Jane Powell, at this year's Festival.

As an orthopedic surgeon, participant Dr. Henry Gamble, III, was accustomed to feeling worthwhile and valued. But when he lost his eyesight to glaucoma in 1991, his professional abilities gradually slipped away as his hands became prisoners of the dark. The adjustment process was

extremely difficult for Gamble, yet he never lost hope. Seeking assistance at VA's Western Blind Rehabilitation Center in Palo Alto, Calif., he found new direction in his life as he began taking sculpture and ceramics classes.

When a fellow veteran told Gamble about VA's creative arts competition, he entered his sculpture, "Universal Concentration II," winning first place in the special recognition category of the arts division. "When I practiced orthopedic surgery, I looked upon it as an art form, a process of creating a masterpiece," explained Gamble. "Now I've found another way of working with my hands to create works that physically represent who I am and how I view the world around me."

According to Moravec, this event provides veterans with more than just clinical health care. "It recognizes a person's potential and brings out what is inside of them in a creative way. That is powerful, and that enhances the value of VA to this nation."

That is precisely what the Creative Arts Festival is all about —



Dr. Henry F. Gamble III (left), of Houston, talks with Dr. Jule Moravec and his wife Lanet about his sculpture, entitled "Universal Concentration II." Gamble won first place in the art division's special recognition category.





*Celia Katherine Perez won first place in the senior solo category of the dance division.*

finding hope and bringing out a person's potential. At the beginning of the Festival, Boise, Idaho, veteran Terry Dotson was often seen sitting by himself. Quiet and reserved, this winner in the art division's pottery category seemed to have difficulty interacting with other participants. However, at the Festival's closing dinner, Dotson bravely approached the podium and began to describe the difficulties he faces as a result of his mental illness.

Using a ceramic platter he created as a visual tool, he described how he is often judged by his appearance, explaining that when people look at him, their view is clouded by the ever-present shadows of his mental illness. Dotson explained that the broken edges of the platter represent his broken image. He described the pleasure he receives from artwork and explained how the colorfully painted designs on the inner surface of the platter represent all the beauty that exists inside him.

After his powerful remarks, Dotson presented his ceramic platter to the Grand Junction VAMC, the host of this year's event, as a thank you for providing this special week. The entire room was silent as Dotson added, "art expresses what is inside each artist and through art you can achieve inner peace."

All of the participants in the



*Earl Jones (left), of Hampton, Va., discusses his work, entitled "Evening Out," winner in the mosaic category of the art division. The work depicts a woman in a hat.*



*Terry Dotson, of Boise, Idaho, winner in the pottery category of the art division, dedicates his ceramic platter to the Grand Junction VAMC, host facility of this year's Creative Arts Festival.*

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival are examples of the hope VA provides veterans. As music director of the Festival for the past ten years, Bill Haworth knows that feeling well.

Haworth was honored this year with the Shirley Jefferies Award, an annual award which recognizes individuals who are dedicated to the success of the event. "As a professional musician, you rarely get the opportunity to work with music in a truly therapeutic sense," said Haworth. "I play a lot of music...but none of it really has the impact on people as much as this program."

VA sponsors the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival with the help of co-sponsor Help Hospitalized Veterans, and long-time national sponsor, The Recording Industries Music Performance Trust Fund. The Festival will be held next year in Washington, D.C., the week of October 16-23, with the final stage show at historic DAR Constitution Hall.

Be sure to reserve your seats early — this is a truly inspirational show you don't want to miss! □

**By Matt Bristol**

# Medal of Honor Memorial Dedicated in California



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr. takes a look at the new Medal of Honor Memorial with Riverside National Cemetery Director Steve Jorgensen.



Secretary West greets Medal of Honor recipient James Hendris.

**T**he nation's only federal memorial honoring the 3,410 men and women who have received the Congressional Medal of Honor was dedicated at Riverside National Cemetery in California on November 5.

The Riverside community raised the \$1.7 million to build the memorial as a gift to the American people in honor of those who went "above and beyond the call of duty" for their country. More than half of the 150 living Medal of Honor recipients

attended the dedication ceremony.

The new memorial is an open-air plaza bounded by the flags of the 50 states and territories. Clusters of nine Italian Cypress trees representing platoons of soldiers surround the memorial. Inside the plaza, black granite walls are inscribed with the names of all Medal of Honor recipients, in the order they received the medal. In the center of the memorial is a water sculpture consisting of 150 water jets representing the living medal recipients. An interactive computer kiosk includes information about each recipient.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo D. West, Jr. accepted the memorial on behalf of VA before an audience of about 3,000. Other speakers included Secretary of Defense William Cohen and California Congressman Ken Calvert (R-Calif.).

The Medal of Honor was established in 1861 as the nation's highest military award for bravery. It is awarded personally by the President for "conspicuous acts of individual gallantry at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty." The memorial dedication was a highlight of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's week-long convention in Riverside. □

## CFC Kickoff at Washington, D.C., VAMC



Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Donna Shalala, chair of the 1999 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) of the National Capital Area, visited the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center on October 20 to participate in the CFC kickoff ceremony. At left, she accepts a Beanie Baby eagle during the ceremony from Dan Rusnak, loaned executive from the CFC.

# Two Employees Honored With Olin E. Teague Award

**T**wo VA employees, Dr. Dennis Wyant, recently retired director of the Indianapolis VA Regional Office, and Dr. Laurie Harkness, director of the Psychiatric Community Care Program for the Connecticut VA Healthcare System, were honored this year with the Olin E. Teague Award for their contributions in improving the lives of war-injured veterans.

VA established the award in honor of the late Olin E. Teague, one of the most decorated combat-disabled soldiers of World War II and a staunch supporter of veterans' programs. Teague served 31 years on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 18 years as chairman.

The accomplishments of this year's Teague Award winners reflect a common ability to initiate and maintain alliances with local government agencies, community leaders, non-profit organizations and health-care professionals. These alliances have resulted in increased funding and other resources necessary for the

development of a broad spectrum of services to veterans.

Wyant played a key role in developing the 19th Star Partnership, a multi-agency effort that offers disabled Indiana veterans job placement assistance. "We reached out and really tried to tap all parts of the community," he said. "Private employers are now coming to us and asking where they can get one of these disabled vets," he added.



Wyant

Wyant also established the Independent Living Project to provide rehabilitative and adaptive equipment and services necessary to help seriously disabled veterans in Southwest Indiana become more independent in their daily lives.

When Harkness noticed the lack of a comprehensive system to care for at-risk veterans in Connecticut, she decided to create one. She designed and implemented the

VA Connecticut Healthcare System's Community Care Center. It has since become a national model for the delivery of rehabilitative services to mentally ill, disabled and/or homeless veterans. The center also has been named a VA Center of Excellence for the Care of the Chronically Mentally Ill.

During his introduction of Harkness at the Teague Award ceremony in Washington, D.C., VA Secretary Togo D. West, Jr., said, "in Connecticut, her record of service to

the nation's veterans has been nothing short of extraordinary."

"I am honored to work with the men and women who have served our country, and I am particularly honored to work with those who carry the wounds of that service," said Harkness. "Much of

my commitment comes from seeing people who struggle with what seem to me like overwhelming obstacles, change their lives." □



Harkness

## VAEA Year 2000 Calendars Available

The VA Employee Association (VAEA) has developed a commemorative calendar for the year 2000. The calendar includes original depictions of many of the nation's military monuments and memorials to 20<sup>th</sup> century service, including the Vietnam Memorial, the Tomb of the Unknowns and the Women In Military Service for America Memorial.

The cost is \$10.99 plus shipping and handling, and proceeds from the sales will benefit veterans service organizations. For more information on how you can purchase the calendar, contact the Employee Association at:

VAEA/Employee Store (832)  
Room C-26  
810 Vermont Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420  
Phone: (202) 273-6261  
Fax: (202) 273-7855



*Former Senator and prostate cancer survivor Robert Dole spoke at the 4th Annual VA Oncology Symposium in October. Held in collaboration with the Department of Defense, civilian and other federal health-care oncology experts, this symposium on state-of-the-art cancer care brought together hundreds of physicians, oncology nurses, pharmacists and administrators. The annual event is designed to help foster rapid dissemination and application of new medical knowledge and technologies to patients throughout the VA health-care system.*

# Lost WWII Vet's Watch Returns to His Alma Mater



VA Central Office employee Michael Bracey, left, and jeweler Afram J. Afram track time and history through a veteran's lost watch.

**M**ichael Bracey has two special interests — watches and history. That, plus a commitment to serving veterans, helped bring a World War II veteran, lost in combat more than a half-century ago, back home to his alma mater.

Bracey, special assistant in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs in VA Central Office, spends much of his free time visiting jewelry shops and flea markets in a search for unusual and antique watches. One of his favorite haunts is a small jewelry shop just a block from VA in downtown Washington run by Afram J. Afram.

During one visit, Bracey noticed a distinctive gold Hamilton pocket watch the jeweler said he had purchased several years ago. It was a handsome piece, monogrammed on the cover. What caught Bracey's eye, however, was the inside back cover. On it was engraved the entire roster of Company E of the 1941 graduating class of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI).

Afram, an expert in restoring old collectible watches, had restored this watch to working order. Bracey, an expert researcher, decided he would restore the watch to its rightful place.

The watch engraving indicated it had been presented to Cadet Captain Fleming Clark Goolsby. Bracey

checked with the VMI library and alumni office and found that Goolsby had graduated from VMI in 1941 to become an Army Air Corps pilot. He was soon in Europe flying air raids over France in the summer of 1942.

An obituary filed away in the VMI library reported that he was shot down over North Africa on December 16, 1942. His remains were never found, but Bracey did discover that his name was listed on the Wall of the Missing at a war memorial cemetery in Carthage, Tunisia.

Bracey presented his research findings to VMI officials in Lexing-

ton, Va., and Afram last summer and was instrumental in getting them together to discuss a suitable disposition of the watch.

In September, Lieutenant Colonel Keith Gibson, director of the VMI Museum, accepted the watch from Afram. It will be displayed at the museum, Gibson said, "as a reminder and touchstone of Goolsby's service to the Corps and to the United States."

"In a way, Cadet Goolsby is back home," Bracey said. "I'm proud to have played a part." □

By Chris Scheer

## *Different Phrase, Same Meaning*



In Hawaiian, One VA translates to "Wiki Wiki" — rapid, fast service. Hawaii's One VA Team came up with a Wiki Wiki reference card that is speeding service for veterans throughout Hawaii's eight islands. The pocket reference provides basic information on benefits and services available to veterans in Hawaii and lists direct phone numbers for subject matter experts. The card outlines special services for women, elderly and homeless veterans. It includes major veterans service organizations and the State Department of Veterans Affairs.

VA is distributing the card to other federal, state and local government agencies, military facilities and other organizations which serve veterans. "For the first time," said Honolulu VA Medical & Regional Office Center (VAM&ROC) Associate Director Gabriel Perez, "VA, state and veterans service organizations speak with one voice, as one organization, to better serve our veterans." Here, the One VA Team unveils the Hawaii One VA Wiki Wiki logo. From left are: Curtis Chang, VA administrative support; Walter Ozawa, Hawaii State Director of Veterans Affairs; Gabriel Perez; Steve Molnar, VA Vet Center team leader; Jim Carilli, Honolulu VAM&ROC assistant director; Lionel Parker, Veterans Service Center chief; and Alan Sumitomo, national cemetery support services supervisor.

# Bayer Honors VA's Health Care Communication Efforts

The Bayer Institute for Health Care Communication gave its first Program Partner Award to VHA in September in recognition of VA input to the design of the non-profit organization's workshops and VA use of the Institute's programs.

Acting Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas Garthwaite accepted the award for the Department. Former director of the Regional Medical Education Center in Cleveland, Dr. Robert Frymier, received the Institute's Board of Director's award for his long-term commitment to improving the quality of clinician-patient communication across VA.

Through Frymier's efforts, VHA and the Institute began in 1991 to teach communication skills to doctors and nurses at VA facilities in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions, in a train-the-trainer manner. A national meeting of network directors and quality and clinical

managers that Frymier convened under the auspices of VHA's Employee Education System exposed them to the Institute program and resulted in its nationwide use. As of September 1999, more than 125 VA staff have been trained to lead workshops and more than 7,700 physicians have participated in them. Frymier says data show the training has improved patient satisfaction.

Bayer's Health Care Communication program offers four workshops. The basic one, "Clinician-Patient Communication to Enhance Health Outcomes," is relevant to communicating with nearly all VA patients, according to Frymier. It covers four E's: how to engage, empathize with, educate and enlist the patient in decision making and compliance with treatment. Another workshop is devoted to communicating with patients when the relationship with a physician is difficult. Two others are being tested or considered.

## 'Healing Circle' Unites Mind, Body, Spirit

George Amiotte (Coyote), an Oglala Lakota and guardian of the Oglala Sundance Society, recently showcased the therapeutic powers of the mind, body and spirit during a traditional Native American Healing Circle held at the Las Vegas VA Medical Center. The ceremony, sponsored by the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) and part of the Native American Special Emphasis Program, was held to benefit those struggling with grief, illness or other trauma.

Amiotte is considered an expert on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He served three tours with the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam and spent four years on the VA Committee on PTSD. Upon his return from Vietnam, Amiotte attended the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and graduated in 1973 with a mid-level practitioner's degree.

He began working as a physician's assistant but soon developed a reputation for being "too intense." Certain cases would re-ignite memories of Vietnam, preventing him from performing his duties. "I was out of rhythm and

balance for a long time," he recalled.

He enrolled in a conventional PTSD treatment program, but found the therapy didn't seem to work. So he began exploring Native American philosophy and spirituality for a way to heal his pain. Amiotte discovered the Healing Circle, and recognizing its therapeutic value, adopted the practice as a treatment for PTSD.

In the Healing Circle, participants share their traumatic experiences and are encouraged to draw upon the healing abilities of the mind, body and spirit. "We have to take those experiences and put them in a sacred place...we can't allow the traumatic events to have a negative effect on the decisions we make today," said Amiotte. He also uses the Healing Circle as a way of reaching out to victims of rape or other sexual trauma, those coping with grief and survivors of hostage or crisis situations.

According to Lisa Howard, a public affairs specialist with the VASNHS, alternative medicine techniques have steadily grown in popularity and the Healing Circle reflects VA's commitment to recognizing the diversity of veterans and their health care needs. □

VHA more recently has developed a communication workshop for non-clinical employees who have contact with patients, using some Institute trainers. Some 3,000 front-line employees have taken "Treating Veterans with Care" since March. Frymier says he hopes to persuade all VHA networks to prepare trainers for the "Care" workshops for non-clinical employees. □

## VA Nurse Wins National Award



Johnson

Lula Johnson, a nurse manager at the Columbia, Mo., VA Medical Center, was chosen over hundreds of her nursing

profession peers from all over the country to receive the first Nurse of the Year Award from Romac Healthcare, a healthcare industry staffing agency.

According to the agency, the award is designed to recognize the accomplishments of nurses who have demonstrated proficiency and excellence in patient care throughout their careers. A panel of distinguished members of the health care profession judged the nominations.

Johnson has been an employee of the Columbia VAMC for more than 22 years, and her wide-ranging experience, clinical expertise, creativity and active involvement in the community were among the qualities that prompted two of her co-workers to nominate her for the honor.

"I eat, sleep, dream and breathe nursing," Johnson said during the award ceremony held recently at the Columbia VAMC. "Nursing is truly a profession that heals with the heart and with hands." □

# VA Employees Aid Hurricane Floyd Victims

**W**eather forecasters had predicted a busy hurricane season for the East Coast in 1999, and they were on target. Flooding caused by heavy rainfall from a succession of late-season storms brought misery to residents throughout the region.

Eastern North Carolina was hardest-hit, with many residents left homeless in the wake of widespread flooding after Hurricane Floyd blew through the area in mid-September. The relentless floodwaters left numerous communities in ruins as they swept through homes, farms and businesses. But VA employees at facilities throughout the state were moved by media reports of the devastation, and quickly responded to the critical needs of their fellow citizens.

The **Durham VA Medical Center (VAMC)** provided two shipments of more than \$20,000 of urgently needed medical supplies to the region through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and also supplied American flags for use in the re-interment of veterans whose remains were displaced by the flooding. The medical center's Partnership Council led a facility-wide drive to collect money and supplies for flood victims. Employees contributed approximately \$3,000 to the American Red Cross, and collected and delivered more than a ton of food to the North Carolina Food Bank.

Two teams of VAMC clinical and administrative employees also traveled to the VA community-based outpatient clinic in Greenville on weekends to provide free flu shots to veterans in need. Individual employees continue to help with the clean-up in the affected communities through local civic and church organizations.

At the **Winston-Salem VA Regional Office**, the generous contributions of employees allowed Director Monty Montgomery to present more than \$12,000 to the Red Cross North Carolina disaster relief effort, and an employee blood drive collected 54 units of blood. Employees also donated more than 500 pounds of food and dry goods to Second Harvest for distribution in

the disaster areas, and Goodwill Industries picked up 15 extra-large shipping boxes of donated clothing.

Employees at the Fayetteville VAMC had their hands full preparing for Hurricane Floyd, but they were not too busy to help fellow North Carolinians who were even closer to the storm's fury. Several employees provided direct support to victims as members of National Guard units recalled to active duty. The VAMC's Employee Association also contributed more than \$1,700 and a truckload of food and clothing to assist victims in neighboring communities.

North Carolina wasn't the only state to suffer devastation from Hurricane Floyd. As the storm moved further up the East Coast, it also dumped up to 15 inches of rain



on several communities in New Jersey, flooding the homes of many residents of Manville and Bound Brook. Residents were evacuated to local high school gymnasiums and auditoriums, which had been transformed into temporary shelters run by the Red Cross.

But a week later, many residents were still unable to return to their flood-damaged homes, and another temporary shelter was needed to allow the schools to re-open. The **VA Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management Somerville Asset Management Service** offered to provide a 30-day shelter in a vacant office building on facility grounds.

Approximately 250 Manville and Bound Brook residents were relocated to the temporary shelter in neighboring Hillsborough. Operated by the Red Cross, the new shelter on

VA grounds offered more privacy for the displaced residents than the school gyms. Dormitory-style quarters were set up for single people in what had been a large conference room in the building, and the small offices were used to house families.

Portable showers and bathrooms were brought in to accommodate shelter residents, and 24-hour medical services, family and personal counseling, job placement assistance and relocation referrals were provided. The shelter was closed after the Red Cross successfully located dwellings for all residents.

Two **Portland, Ore., VAMC** registered nurses got the opportunity to participate directly in the relief efforts when they were sent to North Carolina by the Red Cross in October. Mary Ann Elliott and Jean Bagdanoff served as volunteers on a team of "critical incident stress debriefers" — health workers who help both victims and relief workers deal with mental stress.

They volunteered for the Red Cross Critical Incident Stress Debriefing program in 1998 after attending a VA-sponsored training program on disaster relief. A 30-hour advanced training program taught by Red Cross mental health experts further prepared them to assist in disaster relief missions.

The presence of stress debriefers for relief workers can be critical, they said, because these workers are continuously exposed to the trauma and stress caused by disasters. "The trauma can become so great," Elliott explained, "that relief workers themselves become affected and that's when our team really makes the difference."

Bagdanoff described the devastation she witnessed in North Carolina as "a complex tapestry of human suffering and emotions. So many families needing vouchers for food and basic needs such as clothing and furniture, yet so few workers to handle the incredible load — it all seemed so overwhelming at times!"

Both women are happy to be back home, but said their work with Hurricane Floyd victims is indelibly etched in their minds. □

# It's Not Just a Dog's Life for Key Member of VA's Police Force



Officer Willie Hicks with police dog Rocky.

Officer Willie Hicks, traveled to Los Angeles to spend three days bonding with Rocky before returning to Alabama, where they continued to bond and train. The two of them attend weekly training sessions designed to reinforce and sharpen Rocky's skills.

Hicks and Rocky are certified in drug search and detection, and Rocky also is trained to track missing persons.

Hicks continues working with the dog to refine his policing skills.

He said Rocky is a bit too aggressive and doesn't always release on demand, which is important since that skill is used to stop, not injure, the subjects.

In addition to his VA duties, Rocky also has assisted in operations with the Macon County Sheriff's Department Drug Task Force. But it's not all work and no play for Rocky. VA Police Chief Allen Franklin said he realized that to ensure a successful K-9 program, as well as a happy and healthy animal, he would need to pair the dog with the right handler. Hicks, a dog lover, sees to it that Rocky gets plenty of leisure time to enjoy his favorite off-duty activities — running and playing ball. □

**T**he most unique member of the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System's police force is proving to be quite proficient at his job. Since joining the force last February, Rocky, a five-year-old King Shepherd, has played a key role in operations that have resulted in 20 arrests. Those arrests have in turn led to 15 indictments and 11 convictions.

He also has been instrumental in getting numerous criminal citations issued, including eight illegal weapons arrests and four arrests for controlled substance violations. Born and trained in Germany, Rocky was acquired from the West Los Angeles VA police force. His han-

## Vanguard Web Watcher

■ Looking for information on benefits? For retirement and insurance information, check out the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)'s Web site at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov). Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) information is available at [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov). VA's own Office of Human Resources Management Intranet site, [vaww.va.gov/ohrm](http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm), also includes helpful benefits information.

■ The Selective Service is offering young American men a quicker and easier way to fulfill their civic and legal responsibility to register within 30 days of turning 18. For nearly 20 years, they have had to go to a post office, complete and mail a form, and wait 60 to 90 days to receive an acknowledgment card from Selective Service. But now, young men with a valid social security number can register online through the Selective Service Web site at [www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov).

Vanguard readers are invited to submit suggestions of helpful and informative Web sites of interest to employees, including the Web site address and a brief description of the site's contents, to our e-mail address: [vanguard@mail.va.gov](mailto:vanguard@mail.va.gov).



## Dialogue on Race Relations

VA White House Liaison Office Director Marvin Eason, far left, facilitates a discussion of race relations and education issues at VA Central Office with Howard University students during National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week in September. The students gathered under the auspices of the VA Office of Equal Opportunity and the White House program "One America: Conversations that Bring Us Together."



## VA Awards \$7.5 Million Grant for Wheelchair Research

Researchers at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System have received a \$7.5 million, five-year grant from VA to establish a Center of Excellence for Wheelchairs and Related Technologies and to conduct studies on the use of wheelchairs for illness and trauma rehabilitation at the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL). HERL is a joint venture between the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, University of Pittsburgh and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Health System.

HERL is one of only nine centers nationwide that have been designated a Center of Excellence for Rehabilitation Research and Development and is located at the Highland Drive division of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Rory Cooper, Ph.D., HERL's director, and Michael Boninger, M.D., medical director, will serve as principal investigators.



Cooper

The Center of Excellence for Wheelchair and Related Technologies will focus on five areas: rehabilitation for those with traumatic and other brain injuries; Parkinson's disease; stroke rehabilitation; multiple sclerosis; and spinal cord injury and disease. Most of the research, however, will focus on multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injuries.

Cooper founded HERL in 1994. It is currently the nation's only wheelchair testing laboratory outside the private sector. The laboratory tests wheelchairs for VA, the Federal Drug Administration, and several large wheelchair manufacturers.

## VA Conducting Nation's Largest Colon Cancer Screening Study

Hoping to improve early detection methods, VA is conducting the nation's largest colon cancer screening study at 13 medical centers across the country. The study is being directed by Dr. David Lieberman of the Portland, Ore., VA Medical Center and has screened more than 17,000 veterans between the ages of 50 to 75. Of those screened, 3,285 elected to participate.

Colon cancer is one of the most common cancers among people over 50, but with early detection it can be cured. Although multiple techniques can be used in detecting colon cancer or pre-cancerous polyps, a colonoscopy is considered

the most thorough, as it enables doctors to examine the entire length of the colon. Those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to provide detailed information on their family history and lifestyle, have their blood tested and undergo a colonoscopy.

The results showed that 37 percent of the participants had polyps associated with an increased risk of colon cancer, 11 percent had large pre-cancerous polyps, and one of every 200 had colon cancer. Researchers can now use this information to determine whether there are any patterns to indicate certain people are at a higher risk than normal for developing colon cancer.

## Nashville VAMC's Cardiac Mapping System Mirrors Defense Technology

A team from the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at the Nashville VA Medical Center conducted Tennessee's first cardiac mapping procedure using a navigation system based on Israeli aircraft detection technology.

The NOGA Cardiac Navigation System creates an electro-mechanical map that cardiologists use as a navigational tool when assessing the viability of heart muscle in patients with ischemic heart disease.

Appropriately named after the Hebrew word for Venus, the navigational star, the NOGA system creates a three-dimensional map of the heart's left ventricle by using active magnetic fields generated from beneath the x-ray table along with a passive sensor from within the catheter tip.

The passive sensor provides data to a proprietary global positioning computer that calculates the precise location of the catheter tip relative to a fixed position on the patient. And as the catheter tip is maneuvered within the heart's left ventricle, its movement and location can be tracked.

"This is especially valuable for patients with severe ischemic heart disease and for whom surgery or percutaneous revascularization are not options," noted Paul Robert Myers, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at the Nashville VAMC.

## VA Study Highlights Rising Costs of AIDS Treatment

A recent AIDS/HIV Drug Utilization study conducted by VA finds new antiretroviral drug treatments have provided a significant reduction in AIDS-related deaths. However, the increasing reliance on antiretroviral drugs has led to escalating AIDS treatment costs.

At the Third International Conference on Healthcare Resource Allocation for AIDS/HIV and Other Life-Threatening Illnesses, Dr. Abid Rahman, an epidemiologist at VA Central Office, indicated that between 1992 and 1998, antiretroviral drug prescriptions throughout the VA health care system increased by 546 percent. Increases in antiretroviral drug treatments have also led to a shift from inpatient to outpatient care.

"Patients with HIV gain clear survival benefits from antiretroviral therapy," said Rahman. Yet the shift to outpatient care makes it difficult to calculate the exact increase in AIDS treatment costs. Rahman added, "we don't yet know the extent by which higher drug and clinical expenses are offset by reduced hospital care." □





A cooperative effort between veteran **Martice Birmingham**, a patient on the acute spinal cord injury ward, and staff members of the **Tampa, Fla., VA Medical Center**, has led to the installation of a micro-sprinkler system in the spinal cord injury ward's outdoor patio area. The new system, planned and designed by Birmingham, will benefit spinal cord injury patients who visit with friends and family on the outdoor patio. Spinal cord injury patients typically experience thermal regulatory control dysfunctions and in the intense Florida heat, they are susceptible to heat stroke and other heat-related injuries. At the push of a button, the micro-sprinkler system provides a fine mist that helps cool the body by acting as perspiration on the skin. The project was one of Birmingham's rehabilitative

goals and was made possible through the efforts of his wife Denita and medical center staff members **Cathy Williams**, a recreation therapist, **Walter Davis**, of Engineering Service, and **Dr. Steven Scott**, chief of Spinal Cord Injury Service.

Veterans can now go to the Internet and determine within seconds if the government owes them money from VA life insurance policies. Veterans of World War I, World War II and the Korean War who have lost track of their old VA life insurance policies can now use the Web site to determine if they are entitled to collect unpaid dividends or other proceeds. The VA Web page address is [www.vba.va.gov/vainsurance.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/vainsurance.htm). Using the site is easy — just enter the name of a veteran and the computer will search a roster

of all people owed VA insurance dividends.

In a study recently released by the Office of Advocacy of the U.S. Small Business Administration, 2,235 federal procurement centers were ranked according to the number of prime contracts — those in the amount of \$25,000 or more — awarded to small businesses in 1998. The **Murfreesboro, Tenn., VA Medical Center** ranked eighth in the nation. The medical center had also awarded 100 percent of its \$6.1 million contract budget to small businesses in central Tennessee.

More than 2,700 employees, representing every branch of the Department, attended VA's **Information Technology Conference (ITC)** in Austin, Texas. Attendees selected classes from more than 300 sessions covering virtually every aspect of information technology within VA. Three sessions of broad interest to all employees were broadcast via satellite to VA offices nationwide. The event also included

a vendor exhibit area showcasing the latest technology and a self-paced learning lab offered attendees computer-based training on a variety of software programs.

To reduce **patient waiting times and delays** at VA medical centers, VA has contracted with the Boston-based Institute for Healthcare Improvement to recommend techniques aimed toward providing more timely service. Teams from approximately 130 VA medical centers and outpatient clinics will work together until March 2000 to learn and implement proven time-saving techniques.

VA has a new toll-free number to provide better service to those seeking information about VA's **Direct Deposit/Electronic Funds Transfer (DD/EFT)** initiative. Veterans, dependents and financial institutions can now enroll, initiate changes in direct deposit or inquire about the program by dialing 1-877-838-2778. The helpline's hours are Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m., Central Standard Time. ☐



## Sixth Annual TEE Tournament Draws More than 100 Golfers

The sixth annual TEE (Training, Exposure, Experience) Tournament, a national golfing event for legally blind veterans co-sponsored by VA and the Blinded Veterans Association, drew 110 participants from 25 states. Held in Iowa City in September, the tournament offered participants three levels of play — competitive, intermediate and recreational. Golf clinics also were held to help participants improve their game. A record number of volunteers, 240, assisted with this year's tournament.

For the third time in four years, Louis Robu of Morning Sun, Iowa, won the competitive portion of the TEE Tournament. Jim Bailey, of Godfrey, Ill., won the first Wayne Earle/Hampton Hill Award. The annual award, named for two deceased veterans who had been actively involved in the tournament, will be presented each year to the participant who best exemplifies the spirit of the tournament. Next year's TEE Tournament will be held September 18-21, again in the Iowa City area.

# HONORS



and awards

The Air Force Association named **Guy A. Liedke**, program specialist with the Mental Health Behavioral Sciences Services at the **Tampa, Fla., VA Medical Center**, as its VA Employee of the Year. Liedke was recognized for his efforts in completely revising the application procedures and redesigning the application for the Homeless Providers National Grant/Per Diem Program. As a result of Liedke's efforts, more than 30 pages were eliminated from the application. This encouraged increased participation from community providers, creating more than 500 community-based transitional housing spaces for homeless veterans.

The Wastewater Treatment Program at the **Togus, Maine, VA Medical & Regional Office Center**, competed against more than

17,000 municipal and 45,000 industrial wastewater treatment plants to win second place in the municipal, small-secondary treatment category of the Environmental Protection Agency's National Wastewater Management Excellence Awards Program. The award recognizes facilities that demonstrate a commitment to protecting and improving the quality of our nation's waters. **Don Garrison** heads the Togus VA Wastewater Treatment Program. The treatment plant is supervised by **Steve Martin** and operated by **Dave Gardner** and **Mike Ecker**.

**Paula Pedene**, public affairs officer at the **Phoenix VA Medical Center**, received the 1999 Banner Award for Public Affairs from the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development. Pedene was recognized for utilizing research techniques

to gauge the perceptions of veterans, employees and volunteers about the medical center. Determining the need for improvement, Pedene designed and implemented a public affairs campaign geared toward overcoming communication obstacles, increasing employee morale and improving the medical center's community image. Pedene is the first VA public affairs officer to win the award.

**Kelly Denise Starver**, a nurse with the **VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System**, received the Cameos of Caring Award from Ellen Rudy, dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing. The award was established this year to increase morale and to recognize the outstanding care provided by nurses throughout western Pennsylvania.

Employees of the **VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System** were recognized by the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) for their commitment to identifying and providing the specialty equipment and services

needed by paralyzed veterans. **Louise Roberts**, Patient Services assistant, **Jackie Collins**, chief of Prosthetics Service and **Tyrone Hunter**, SCI/Minority Veterans Coordinator, were honored for demonstrating sensitivity, kindness and compassion to veterans and their families during PVA's Annual Installation of Officers Banquet in Waveland, Miss.

**Sonja Allen**, a Veterans Service representative, Minority Veterans Coordinator and EEO Committee member at the **Little Rock, Ark., VA Regional Office**, was named Arkansas' Federal Woman of the Year in the Professional/Administrative/Technical category. Allen is a member of the National Association for Female Executives and a participant in the Volunteers in Public Schools program.

**Wei Xue, M.D., Ph.D.**, a dermatology resident at the **Detroit VA Medical Center**, received the 1999 American Academy of Dermatology Award for Young Investigators. This award recognizes the efforts of rising dermatologists throughout the United



Schally

## Nobel Prize Winner Schally Receives New VA Research Award

VA researcher and Nobel Prize winner Andrew V. Schally, Ph.D., is the first recipient of the newly established VA Distinguished Medical Research Scientist Award. The award will fund Dr. Schally's work for the next four years, and was based both on his highly productive scientific career and his proposed plans for research on new cancer therapies.

His work involves two new approaches to cancer that are expected to lead to improved treatment for many forms of the disease. One approach is based on linking a chemotherapeutic agent to a carrier that delivers this agent very specifically to tumor cells. This "magic bullet" therapy could replace systemic chemotherapy, along with its adverse side effects. The second approach is based on blocking tumor growth with antagonists against growth factors.

The research will be conducted at the New Orleans VA Medical Center, where Schally heads up the Endocrine, Polypeptide and Cancer Institute. Schally won the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology in 1977 for his discovery of substances in the brain that regulate the endocrine system.

States and Canada. The subject of Xue's investigation is "Molecular Studies of Pemphigus Autoantibody induced Acantholysis."

**Janie Heath, R.N.**, of the **Augusta, Ga., VA Medical Center**, was named 1999 Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) Nurse of the Year by the Georgia Nurses Association. The CSRA includes counties in Georgia, South Carolina and the Ft. Gordon military installation. The award is given to registered nurses who exemplify the spirit of caring and portray a positive image of nursing.

**Frank Q. Nuttall, M.D., Ph.D.**, director of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Nutrition at the **Minneapolis, Minn., VA Medical Center**, was selected to receive the annual David M. Worthen Award for Academic Excellence. A renowned endocrinologist, Nuttall's work and teaching activities have had a worldwide impact on the education of practitioners, diabetic patients and their families. Whether as a clinician, teacher and researcher, Nuttall has been an outstanding role model with VA since 1961.

The American Psychological Association's Division 18 recognized the **Jamaica Plain Campus of the VA Boston Healthcare System** for its outstanding contributions to public sector research and practice in psychology. "This is a terrific honor due to the hard work and efforts of many people," said **Terence Keane, Ph.D.**, chief of Psychology Service at the Boston VAMC.

**Dr. Steve Cohen**, director of the **Dayton, Ohio, VA Medical Center**, was honored with the prestigious 1999 Manager of the Year Award at the Blacks-in-Government

(BIG) Annual Conference. The keynote speaker, VA Secretary Togo D. West, Jr., expressed his pride both in Cohen's achievements and in having a VA leader recognized as a BIG national award winner. Since becoming director of the Dayton VAMC, Cohen has initiated numerous programs and activities designed to increase awareness and appreciation for the facility's many ethnic groups.

**Jana Johnson**, associate director, and **Shirley Caldwell**, nurse executive, at the **Las Vegas VA Medical Center** were recently included in the Distinguished Women of Southern Nevada's 1999 directory. Nevada Lt. Governor Lorraine Hunt noted that the honorees "provide our younger generation the inspiration to become productive members of our Nevada community."

**Candy Wright, R.N.**, nurse manager for the Dialysis Unit at the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System**, received a Volunteer Service Award from the National Kidney Foundation. Wright has been a volunteer with the National Kidney Foundation of Arkansas since 1982. The award is presented annually to individuals who have significantly contributed toward increasing public awareness about kidney disease, organ donation and other foundation programs.

**Karla Porter**, director of the Health Information Management (HIM) section at the **Nashville VA Medical Center**, was named VHA's Health Information Management Professional of the Year. Porter's support of national HIM programs includes forming the VISN 9 HIM council and serving as its chair, serving as a mentor for

new HIM professionals and as Acting Director for HIM in VA Central Office.

The Veterans Health Administration's **VISNs 1, 3, 8, 12, and 20** received VA Scissors Awards for establishing a Resource Pool to leverage VISN resources to assure quality maintenance of sophisticated medical equipment and systems. Collectively, the five VISN Resource Pools have saved nearly \$4 million in the few years since their inception.

**Nancy Miller Graben, R.N.**, chief of Clinical Informatics at the **VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System**, recently became the only registered nurse in the state of Mississippi to be certified in Nursing Informatics by the American Nurses' Association (ANA). Less than 400 registered nurses hold this certification in the United States. Graben also holds certification by ANA in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing and is a member of Sigma Theta Tau, the Honor Society of Nursing.

The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS) honored **VISN 8** (Bay Pines, Fla.) Director **Dr. Robert Roswell** with the 1999 John D. Chase Award for Physician Executive Excellence. The award is presented annually to a physician in the Army, Navy, Air Force, U.S. Public Health Service or VA in recognition of sustained outstanding performance and leadership in federal health care management.

The North Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association recently honored two employees of the **Fargo, N.D., VA Medical & Regional Office Center**. **Laurel Peterson**, health benefits

advisor, representing the medical center, and **Michael Olson**, of the Adjudication Division, representing the regional office, were selected by the association as VA Employees of the Year.

Chief of Staff **Alexander S. Townes, M.D.**, of the **Nashville VA Medical Center**, received the 1999 Philip Hensch Award from the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS). The award is given annually to a physician in the federal medical services who has made significant contributions in the field of rheumatology and arthritis. Townes treats patients in the VAMC's rheumatology clinic, provides specialty consulting and teaches medical students and internal medicine residents as a Professor of Medicine at Vanderbilt University.

Two employees of the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** were recently appointed to serve on state professional boards by Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee. **Azzie Watts**, a licensed social worker, will serve on the Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board until June 2002 and **James Rasch, M.D.**, an internal medicine specialist, will serve on the Arkansas Respiratory Care Examining Committee through August 2002.

**Ruth Johnston**, a geriatric and rehabilitation dietitian with the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System**, was elected president of the Arkansas Dietetic Association. A VA employee since 1983, Johnston is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing and an Instructor of Dietetics and Nutrition at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. □

# HEROES



**Jeffery Barbee, R.N.**, an emergency room staff nurse at the **Milwaukee, Wis., VA Medical Center**, was leaving work when he saw a giant crane used in the construction of a nearby baseball field suddenly collapse onto the stadium. Rushing to the site of the accident, Barbee climbed under the fallen crane, through shattered glass, and administered first aid to the injured crane operator. Barbee applied pressure to the victim's wounds and stabilized his neck to prevent additional spinal cord injury. He stayed with the victim until emergency medical technicians arrived and although there were three casualties in this tragic accident, thanks to Barbee's actions, the crane operator survived.



The morning commute started routinely enough for **Jonathan McBride**, program support clerk in **VBA's Office of Information Management** in VA Central Office, on October 28. He showed up at the "slug" line at 7:30 a.m. as usual to get a ride from his home in Virginia to VACO. In the D.C. area, slug lines allow drivers to pick up extra passengers so they can use the express lanes into the city. That day, a late-model sport-utility vehicle (SUV) was waiting to give McBride a lift to work. Five minutes into the 15-minute trip, something felt wrong, and McBride looked up just in time to see the SUV drifting off the right side of the roadway, inches from slamming into the concrete wall. The driver was slumped

in his seat, unconscious. A quick-thinking McBride was eventually able to get control of the speeding SUV as it careened down the roadway. As he frantically searched for a place to pull over, the driver regained consciousness. Insisting he was okay, the driver resumed the trip into town, apologizing repeatedly for what had happened. As they arrived at their destination, a relieved McBride and a female passenger got out of the vehicle after ensuring that the driver was still okay. The woman hugged McBride, thanked him for his heroic actions, and all three D.C. commuters went their separate ways.



**Jerome Volesky**, a vocational rehabilitation specialist at the **Battle Creek, Mich., VA Medical Center**, was swimming in a hotel pool when someone noticed that a young girl was submerged underwater. Volesky quickly swam toward her and helped pull her from the pool. The girl was not breathing, so he helped perform CPR. Others began assisting with the rescue effort, so Volesky ran to a nearby telephone to call for help. Thanks to Volesky's quick thinking and knowledge of CPR, the girl was breathing normally when emergency medical technicians arrived.



While on a motorcycle ride with friends in rural Arkansas, four **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** employees came upon a

motorcycle accident. Witnesses reported that the rider had misjudged a curve and left the road, landing near a tree. Wasting no time, Registered Nurse **Jennifer Conner**, Safety Manager **John Beatty**, Emergency Medical Preparedness Office Area Manager **Billy Conner** and Public Affairs Specialist **Derenda Summerlin** hurried to assist the victim. Together, they administered advanced first aid and monitored the victim's vital signs for more than an hour until the arrival of emergency medical technicians.



While driving to work one morning, **Esther Moore**, a vascular technologist at the **Madison, Wis., VA Medical Center**, came upon a motor vehicle accident. Evaluating the extent of the accident, Moore suddenly realized that one of the victims was pinned inside his vehicle. Asking a witness to call for an ambulance, Moore rushed to aid the trapped victim. She offered first aid and encouragement to the man until rescue workers arrived and used the "Jaws of Life" to free him. Moore remained calm throughout the incident and knew exactly how to help — in her spare time she's a volunteer with the local Emergency Medical Service.



While traveling with a group to the Scottsbluff, Neb., State Veterans Home, **Leslie Thomas**, a physical therapist at the **Cheyenne, Wyo., VA Medical Center**, suddenly screamed, "stop the van now!" As the van came to a stop, Thomas jumped out the door and ran behind the vehicle. The other team members in the van turned to see where Thomas was running and

noticed a small child slowly walking toward the busy street. Dodging traffic, Thomas ran into the street and carried the child out of harm's way. When Thomas returned the child to her worried mother, witnesses stopped their cars and began applauding her heroic deed.



**Kimberley Kapica**, staff assistant to the network director of the **VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22)**, was driving home after dropping off her daughter at volleyball practice when she saw an elderly gentleman stumble and fall to the ground. She immediately pulled her car over to the side of the road and rushed to the man's aid. Kapica noticed that he was bleeding from a large cut above his left eye and had scraped his leg. The injured area began to swell, so Kapica called 911 and provided first aid and comfort until paramedics arrived. □

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## Corrections

In the September/October issue, we incorrectly identified the seated Memphis VAMC employee pictured in the top left photo on page 6 as Sarah Carter. She is in fact Chief Nurse Betty Alsup.

Our story on the opening of VBA's Point of Presence (POP) on the Internet featured in the September/October issue (page 16), identified the location of the ribbon-cutting ceremony as the Philadelphia VA Regional Office & Insurance Center. The ceremony was actually held at the Philadelphia Benefits Delivery Center (BDC) in recognition of the hard work done by BDC employees to bring this project to fruition.