



VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTH CARE NETWORK - VISN SIX

Vol. 4, No. 2

"Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here"

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

November 30, 2013

Salem VAMC Expands Access To Mental Health Care

By Kenita D. Gordon
VISN 6 public affairs

To commemorate the expansion of access to mental health care at the Salem VAMC, VISN 6 leadership, Veterans Service Organizations, and legislative representatives celebrated the opening of a new mental health building Nov. 20.

This new \$9.5 million, 24,000 square foot, 38-bed, acute mental health inpatient unit is expected to be ready for patients in early January and will serve Veterans located

throughout 26 counties of Southwest Va., as well as some coming from W.Va. and N.C.

With the opening of this facility, VA and VISN 6 are closer to achieving the vision of the the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health which stated: "We envision a future when everyone with a mental illness will recover...when mental illness can be prevented or cured...detected early...a future when everyone with mental illness

[Continued on Pg 5](#)



Bruce Sprecher

Doctors Delmar Short, David Buyck and Miguel LaPuz cut the ribbon for the new mental health facility while others look on.

Mental Health Center Groundbreaking

On Nov. 8, the Richmond VAMC broke ground for an \$8.2 million, 19,000 square foot expansion which will serve to enhance the facility's Mental Health Services. The expansion will be handled by CTA Builders from Fort Mill, S.C.

Located adjacent to the Emergency Department, the new addition will offer a spectrum of recovery-oriented, patient-centered, mental health services for Veterans and their families. The expansion will include exam and group rooms as well as additional assessment and therapy space and is expected to

[Continued on Pg 8](#)



Mary Betty Brooks

L-R: Dr. Treven Pickett, Mental Health Services, Lloyd Lenhart, Congressman Eric Cantor's office, Commissioner Paul Galanti, Virginia Department of Veterans Services, John Brandecker, medical center director, Dr. Brian Meyer, Mental Health Services, Dr. Christine Baker, Outpatient Clinical Director, and Joe Sinicrope, CTA Builders.

Inside in Brief

- Pg 3** Dec. 7 is Pearl Harbor Day; Profile of a Navy Veteran of the attack.
- Pg 4** Beckley receives new mobile clinic; Greenville HCC to open.
- Pg 6** Richmond radiation oncology recognized; Fayetteville oncology.
- Pg 7** Virginia Wounded Warrior Program celebrates five years.
- Pg 8** Salisbury Rural Health Team helps Veteran job seekers.
- Pg 10** VA offers dental insurance to eligible Veterans, family members.
- Pg 11** One million now benefit from Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- Pg 12** VISN 6 Sites of Care and VA Vet Centers.

Q.S.V. Prioritizing Equipment Equitably

On Page One we are highlighting two more events focused on enhancing access to care. Throughout the year, we've also communicated what we have done and are doing with regard to recruiting providers and staff. Space and staffs are two of foundation pieces required in providing health care. A third piece is having the right equipment in the right place for the right providers to use. In this issue, I'd like to share how we prioritize the equipment we buy.

I've heard comments from some who believe certain VISN 6 facilities always get the lion's share of money. They are right. And, they are wrong. Money is certainly allocated by the number of Veterans served and also by the complexity of the services performed in the facility, but when it comes to prioritizing our annual procurement of high-dollar equipment, we have a system that is fair, equitable and focused on maximizing Quality, Safety and Value (QSV).

We prioritize the procurement of High Cost/Highly Technical through our Capital Investment Board. The CIB is made up of leadership from every facility that bring to the table each medical center's priorities where they are combined into a master list which is then reviewed and voted on by the entire team.

We review each item in consideration of what Quality, Safety and Value they bring to the network as a whole.

Some items might need updating to meet regulatory requirements. Some may just be worn out and others may be driven by technological advances. Regardless of whether we're looking at beds, mattresses, walk-in refrigerators, defibrillators, MRIs, CT scanners or specialty equipment for operating rooms, each item is weighed against how they improve patient satisfaction, increase productivity, reduce the need to send patients to outside providers, show quantifiable cost benefits, and impact the network's integration efforts. We also



consider the risk reduction and risk avoidance the new product provides and finally, we consider other possible alternatives.

At the end of the discussion, the input from the entire team determines the right priorities for the VISN as a whole.

Not all that long ago, I took the reins of this great organization and set my sights on where we need to be to meet and exceed the needs of America's Veterans past, present and future. Since my arrival in 2000, my vision has remained steadfast—to build the best integrated health care network possible, one that is greater than the sum of its parts.

I am proud of what we've accomplished thus far. Today, we provide health care for about 70 percent more Veterans than we did 10 years ago. And, we do so in a more comprehensive manner by sharing and leveraging all our resources.

We've created new access points, closing the huge gaps between facilities that existed. We've worked to ensure that our 37 sites of care currently operating will be sustainable over the long-term. We crunched the numbers time and again, looking at each location and balancing the Veteran population with the ability to hire and retain staff, as well as what ancillary services, highways and even places to eat are available in each area.

It's unrealistic to think that there will come a time when any health care network will have every specialty in every location. So, our effort to serve the most Veterans in the best possible manner requires we leverage the talent of every provider, all our facilities and every piece of equipment.

Together, this network is better than the sum of its parts. Regardless of what the future brings, you can rest assured that we will work tirelessly to ensure we are prepared to live up to our commitment to providing Veterans with high-quality healthcare that is personalized, proactive, patient-driven.

I wish you all a happy and safe holiday season and my thanks to all Veterans for your service, and to all VISN 6 for your efforts throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Dan Hoffmann

Voices of VISN 6 is published monthly by VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network.

Questions or comments about the newsletter, e-mail Bruce. Sprecher@va.gov or call 919-956-5541.



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Dec. 7 Is Pearl Harbor Day



Poster by Allen Saalburg, 1942



Darlene Edwards

George Bland points to a past article outlining his experiences in WWII and at Pearl Harbor.

WWII Navy Veteran: 'I'll Never Forget Pearl Harbor'

By Darlene Edwards
Richmond VAMC public affairs

As we approach Pearl Harbor Day, the events and loss of that life are remembered across our nation and around the world.

Those events are very real to Mr. George Bland, a gunners mate stationed onboard USS West Virginia at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7.

Born in Bloomington, N.C., the Bland family relocated to Richmond, Va., when George was 6 years old.

After graduating from high school in 1940, Bland entered the Navy as a Seaman. Upon completing the Gunners School, he was assigned to the USS West Virginia Pacific Battleship Group as a Gunners Mate and stationed at Pearl Harbor.

When asked about his recollection of the attack, he can recall the moments like it was yesterday. What started out as a beautiful December Sunday morning ended in a day with thousands of casualties and America's entrance into World War II.

"Shortly before 8 a.m., I went topside and left the ship to pick up the officers' mail and supplies," said Bland. "If it wasn't for the supply run detail I was on, I would have been blown to pieces along with many of my shipmates."

Bland goes on to tell about the horrific events that would unfold over the next sixteen hours. From hearing the roar of engines during the first wave of attacks shortly after 8 a.m. and hearing the calls to "battle stations" over the loudspeakers, to abandoning the battleship West Virginia by jumping into burning waters 50 feet below, his memory of that fatal day still recalls the screams for help from fellow Seamen, the smells of burning decks, fuel and flesh with a high degree of clar-

ity for the 90 year old.

Of the eight battleships moored at Pearl Harbor that morning, USS Arizona, California, Oklahoma, and West Virginia were sunk during the attack. Arizona suffered the most serious damage and loss of life, experiencing an explosion in a forward magazine that broke the hull in two. Of the other four, only Nevada had serious damage.

After spending six years in the Navy, Bland went to work for the US Post Office where he spent the next 25 years and then retired.

Bland has been married for over 50 years to Ethel. He is a proud husband and father of two sons, and a host of grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friend to hundreds of people he has met and served with over the years.

Today, Bland is a resident at the Sitter Barefoot Veterans Care Center located on the campus of the Richmond VAMC. He is proud to have served his country.

"I'm most proud of the men I served with that day. If I had to do it over again, I would," says Bland. "I have received many awards and certificates for my actions that day and I cherish each day the good Lord gives me."

3rd Mobile Clinic Delivered, Beckley Readies For Service

Beckley VAMC Director Karin L. McGraw announced that the medical center received the new mobile health clinic that will be used to focus on outreach efforts in Southeastern W. Va.

The mobile clinic, like VA's community based outpatient clinics, is an extension of the medical center and will offer access to primary care services. The wheel chair accessible mobile clinic is fully self-contained, including two exam rooms, a waiting area and a restroom, and will be able to maintain access to electronic records through the use of satellite technology.

"We are committed to increasing the ability of Veterans living in southern West Virginia to take advantage of VA health care," said McGraw.

This new mobile clinic is the third in the VISN, with one at Richmond VAMC and the second operating out of the Fayetteville VAMC.



Above: Beckley VAMC mobile health clinic. Right: An exam room in the mobile health clinic.



Photos by Debbie Voloski

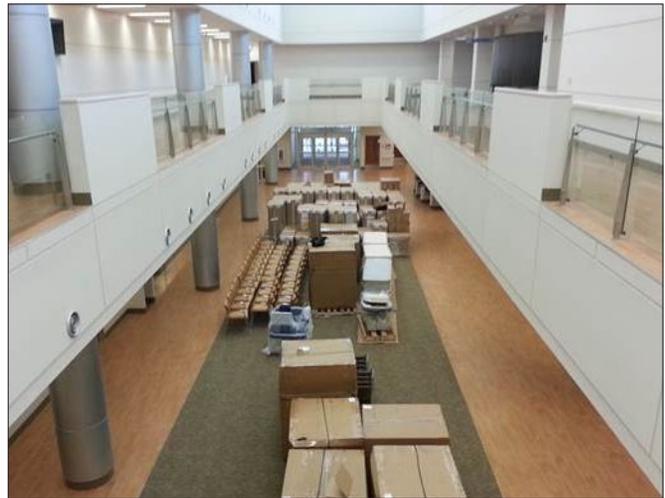
Greenville HCC To Open In Early 2014

The new Greenville VA Health Care Center (HCC) is on track to open in early 2014. The building is being readied for patient care services, with medical equipment, computers, phones, and furniture being installed in preparation for relocation of the Greenville CBOC staff in early 2014. Veterans will soon be notified of the start date for operations at the new facility.



Courtesy Photo

The staff from the Greenville CBOC will relocate to the new facility and begin seeing patients in early 2014. The 116,000-square-foot outpatient HCC is about seven times the size of the existing Greenville CBOC and is located only short distance away at 401 Moyer Boulevard, Greenville, NC 27834.



Courtesy Photo

The HCC will service as many as 20,000 Veterans in eastern N.C. and provide primary care, mental health, prosthetics, physical therapy services and specialty services including but not limited to: women's health, audiology, orthopedics, optometry, dental, pharmacy, radiology and laboratory.

December is International AIDS Awareness Month

VA joins the nation in its commitment to the awareness, prevention, detection, and treatment of HIV and AIDS. This year's theme is "Shared Responsibility: Strengthening Results for an AIDS-Free Generation." The awareness month kicked off on World AIDS Day, December 1st.



VA currently leads the country in HIV/AIDS screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention

and is the single largest provider of treatment nationwide. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 1.1 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection. There are over 25,000 Veterans in VA care living with HIV/AIDS. VA's high-quality care helps Veterans with HIV/AIDS live longer, healthier lives.

Although the annual number of new HIV infections has remained relatively stable, the number of people living with HIV has increased over the past decade. VA encourages all Veterans to get tested and know their status. Like many other diseases, it is better to diagnose and treat HIV early rather than late.

For more information please visit www.hiv.va.gov.

Mental Health Care continued from Pg 1

has access to effective treatment."

"Veterans Affairs embraces the concept of Recovery whole-heartedly" said Dr. David Buyck, Director of Mental Health Integration at the Salem VAMC. "Even during the course of an inpatient hospitalization, Veterans can pursue and achieve personally defined goals that support their recovery, result in improved health and well-being, and promote full participation in the communities of their choice. Inpatient mental health services constitute part of the recovery journey and thus reflect and incorporate the principles of dignity and recovery in the provision of services, as well as the environment of care" added Buyck.

The new building is an addition to the existing facility at Salem and is double the square footage of the prior inpatient unit. It is a safe, patient-centric, healing and therapeutic environment boasting warm and inviting spaces with large windows, and rooms painted in soothing hues. The unit has a large group, dining, and activity area with large skylights and open space.

According to Salem VAMC leadership, safety, comfort, and dignity were the ideas behind the conceptualization and design of this building. "As you will see all around you today, VAMC Salem, Dr. Short and his team believe that safety, comfort and dignity are not mutually exclusive. Safety may be first, but the dignity of a warm, homelike, environment and compassionate staff is also essential to healing and recovery" said Buyck.

Dr. Miguel LaPuz, director, Salem VAMC agrees and adds "the unit was designed to provide our Veterans with an environment that is private with the comforts of home. The building also has a separate inpatient area for women which eases the privacy concerns of our female patients and gives them more inpatient treatment options."

The unit also provides a private area for geriatric patients, and hosts centralized nursing stations and sections with access to outdoor areas for patients. The unit

also contains a large teaching space for medical, nursing and pharmacy students and residents. The new facility will provide important resources to make a positive impact on Veterans who will now be able to receive comprehensive medical and mental health care in one location.

On The Occasion Of Opening The New Salem Mental Health Facility...

"It is my firm belief that a military career is one of the most honorable professions; we are all indebted to our Veterans for their service. I am humbled by their commitment to serving our country in every way. We are a country that is blessed with freedoms that many people from all over the world aspire to obtain. None of this would be possible here in America without the courage of our men and women in uniform. Thank you for your commitment and service to the health of our Veterans."

In a letter from Sen. Mark Warner

"Today's ceremony is the culmination of a great deal of work by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans organizations to better address the mental health needs of all Veterans. I am delighted that the goal to provide these very important services is being met."

In a letter from Rep. Bob Goodlatte

Richmond VAMC's Radiation Oncology Recognized

In November, the American College of Radiology (ACR) awarded the Richmond VAMC a three-year accreditation for their Radiation Oncology program. Richmond joins Durham VAMC in the ranks of facilities recognized by the ACR.

The ACR accreditation represents the highest level of quality and patient safety. It is awarded to facilities meeting specific guidelines and technical standards developed by ACR.

During the accreditation process, a facility's personnel, equipment, treatment planning and treatment records, as well as patient safety policies, quality control/quality assessment activities are assessed.

Richmond VAMC's Radiology Service is committed to providing the highest quality oncology treatments through use of advanced oncology treatments and its partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University's Massey Cancer Center.

One of Richmond's prized treatments is its prostate Brachytherapy – a procedure where radioactive seeds (pellets) are implanted into the prostate gland to kill prostate cancer cells. It is also the first VA site to utilize Multiparametric MRI for treatment of prostate cancer.

Richmond VAMC is one of seven medical centers in VA to offer prostate Brachytherapy and these capabilities allow them to treat Veterans from across the country.

The Durham VAMC will soon expand their radiology capabilities to include Brachytherapy. According to Durham VAMC Radiologist Dr. Joseph Salama, "Durham currently performs advanced radiotherapy procedures including intracranial radiosurgery for benign and malignant disease, extracranial stereotactic body radiotherapy, as well as intensity-modulated radiotherapy image-guided radiotherapy and volumetric modulated arc therapy."

At Richmond, the two medical providers at the



Courtesy Photo
Vicki Skinner, RN and Dr. Michael Chang of the Richmond VAMC Radiology and Oncology Service.

forefront of this accreditation and partnership are Richmond VAMC's Vicki Skinner, Clinical Research Nurse Coordinator and Dr. Michael Chang, Chief of Radiation Oncology. Skinner has worked with both the Richmond VAMC and Massey Cancer Center for the past 14 years.

Skinner coordinates all oncology research studies sponsored through Massey Cancer Center at the Richmond VAMC. Through the Massey Cancer Center supported position she facilitates the process for Veterans to participate in National Cancer Institute sponsored clinical trials.

Chang specializes in cancers of the central nervous system (CNS), head and neck region, lung, and prostate. He is responsible for the CNS stereotactic radiosurgery programs at both the Richmond VAMC and VCU Massey Cancer Center.

Oncology Services Coming To Fayetteville In 2014

By Steve Wilkins
VISN 6 public affairs

Fayetteville VAMC patients being treated for cancer in civilian medical facilities will soon be able to receive cancer treatment at the medical center.

VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel approved the medical center's request for medical oncology services Oct. 31, saying, "The addition of on-site chemotherapy will provide Veterans with improved continuity of care," which according to Fayetteville's Director Elizabeth Goolsby, "is critical in an oncology diagnosis and treatment."

An oncologist is already on staff and preparations are underway to staff and equip space inside the facility for anticipated commencement of basic oncological

services toward the end of 2014 according to Goolsby.

Intent on assuring Veterans the best possible care, Goolsby said, "We will start with basic protocols then move into more complex protocols at a rate that makes sense for our staff and patient population." The medical center is not expected to develop research capability. However, "We expect about 85 percent of the chemotherapeutic protocols in use [nationally] will be available to our patients."

Doctor Petzel's approval is based on support from VISN 6 Director Dan Hoffmann who said, "Being able to provide oncology services in Fayetteville is an extremely positive step for Veterans in this part of the state. We're very pleased to receive the approval and look forward to bringing this service on line as soon as possible."

Virginia Wounded Warrior Pgm Celebrates 5 Years

In a ceremony held Oct. 18 at the Virginia War Memorial Shrine of Memory, Governor Robert F. McDonnell recognized the fifth anniversary of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program stating that the program “is recognized across the Commonwealth [of Virginia] for including a safety net of healthcare, behavioral healthcare, rehabilitation and community support services for not just veterans, but members of the Virginia National Guard and Reserves and their families.”

McDonnell praised the program, calling it a “national model” and told the crowd that the program has served over 17,000 Veterans and family members over the past five years.

Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services Paul Galanti said, “This program has grown from nothing to world class in five years.”

Deputy Commissioner and Executive Director Catherine Wilson recognized and praised the staff of VWWP for their work to connect Veterans and their families to services.

“The VWWP is second to none,” she said. “It is comprised of a group of people who have so much passion and devotion for taking care of our men and women who have worn the uniform. We now support Veterans and families who may be at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

“We support Veterans involved with the criminal justice system with the goal of preventing incarceration. We reach out into communities, in person and virtually, to encourage Veterans and their families to seek help early, to take advantage of the healthcare and be-



Courtesy Photo
Gov. Bob McDonnell addresses the crowd while VWWP Executive Director Catherine Wilson and Commissioner Paul Galanti listen.

havioral healthcare available to them,” she concluded. The ceremony was attended by hundreds representing the community partners who support the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. The Colors were posted by an all female team from the Surry County Virginia High School Junior ROTC and Virginia Commonwealth University Brass Ensemble provided the music for the formal ceremony and reception that followed.

A brief video history of the VWWP was shown. The film can be accessed at the following link <https://vimeo.com/77792443>.

Navy Veteran Provides 40+ Years Of Service To Asheville

By, Scott Pittillo
Asheville VAMC public affairs

Eddie Sherlin knows his way around the Asheville VAMC. He should as he has worked at the facility for more than 42 years. A native of Asheville, Sherlin came to the medical center in 1971 after leaving the Navy. The medical center seemed to be natural fit for Sherlin since both his father and grandfather had both served in the military and went on to work at the facility.

Many of the employees at the time Sherlin began working at the facility were World War II Veterans. Most of the patients they were serving were from World War I, and some had even served in the Spanish American War.

Sherlin began his career as a housekeeper making \$2 an hour. “It doesn’t sound like much,” said Sherlin, “but when you figure that gas was about 32 cents a gallon, it wasn’t that bad.” He soon moved to the boiler room where he worked for about 10 years. Now days he works as the Utility System Operator Foreman man-

aging maintenance and repairs around the facility.

Sherlin enjoys his work and takes pride in every task assigned to him.

“I’ve done everything (at the medical center) from trying to keep pigeons off the walls to helping to build ramps and gazebos for our Veterans.”

His advice for new employees would be to “stick it out; it’s a good place to work and you never know what job you might move into.” When asked if retirement is on the horizon, with 42 years at CGVAMC under his belt, Sherlin replied, “It’s getting close but for right now I just really enjoy what I’m doing. I think it’s an honor to work here and to serve those who have laid their lives on the line in service to our country.”



Eddie Sherlin

Salisbury Rural Health Team Helps Veteran Job Seekers

By Michael Maddox
Salisbury VAMC public affairs

Hundreds of Veterans from across North Carolina recently visited the RecruitMilitary Veteran Career Fair held at the Charlotte Motor Speedway Nov. 21, to learn about opportunities to get back in the job market. While there, they were also able to meet with members of the Salisbury VAMC Rural Health Integration team to learn about VA medical care benefits they may be eligible for.

The team answered questions about medical appointments, eligibility and healthcare services with more than 300 of the 411 Veterans who attended the four-hour event. They also provided VA health care applications to 38 of the job seekers.

Edwina Gray-Wright, Salisbury VAMC's Rural Health Integration program manager, said "We have been attending job fairs for the past few years that are geared towards Veterans. The logic being if a Veteran is looking for employment, then there is the likelihood that they also do not have healthcare, and many are Veterans of OIF/OEF and eligible for free care."

Steve Balczó, director of military outreach for RecruitMilitary, said it's always a winning situation for everyone involved when his group can partner with VA at their job fair events.

"I think VA's presence at the job fairs provides the Veterans an opportunity to assess their health needs, dental needs and everything else going on in relation to their former service," said Balczó. "It's a nice linkage – Veterans showing up to find an opportunity and the VA's



Michael Maddox
Edwina Gray-Wright, Salisbury VAMC's Rural Health Integration program manager, answers Veteran's questions about VA health care services.

presence there really helps in coordinating that and adds value to our expos."

Gray-Wright said it's always an honor for the Rural Health Integration team to serve any Veteran in need any way they can. "This was a great event. We were able to assist many Veterans."

For more information about the Rural Health program, check out their web page at www.salisbury.va.gov/services/Rural_Health_Initiative.asp. For a schedule of when and where the team will be, visit www.salisbury.va.gov/calendar.asp.

Groundbreaking continued from Pg 1

be completed in about one year.

"The new addition will increase the existing mental health unit space by about 50 percent and will provide space for more than 20 mental health employees who were hired in 2013," said Brian Meyer, interim associate chief of mental health services at the hospital.

The new Mental Health Recovery Enhancement Center (MHREC) will offer a dedicated check-in space for patients on the first floor. The new second floor expansion will be accented with storefront windows for improved day lighting.

The goal behind the design of the MHREC says Pickett is to promote Veterans' sense of well-being, and further empower them to reach their full potential "The environmental design of the space was developed with Veterans' input. The space will provide a family friendly environment including a welcoming, centralized check-in, child care, and extended hours. Elements of light, sound, color and texture were incorporated into the design as a way of infusing recovery principles into the environment of care," said Pickett.

According to Dr. Treven Pickett, "The expansion will provide additional space for the provision of evidence-based mental health services for Veterans and their families," and is intended to communicate the principle that recovery-oriented mental health care is an important, essential component of overall healthcare."

The expansion will accommodate specialty mental health programs, providers, and treatment space for special populations that are projected to grow over the next 10 years including but not limited to Women Veterans, Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn Veterans.

An additional goal of the MHREC is to help those Veterans presenting with PTSD, depression, TBI, and a range of addictions including prescription opiates. "What we are trying to do is help people to back off and use other methods," Meyer said.

"Our goal is to use a lot of different kinds of treatments that include meditation, yoga, acupuncture, tai chi, to biofeedback. The basic idea is to get them off the opiates, which may endanger their lives," Meyer said.

Hampton VAMC, Community Partner To Help Homeless

By James Coty
Hampton VAMC public affairs

From haircuts to food to help filing disability claims, nearly 200 homeless Veterans received assistance during a homeless stand down held Nov. 16 at the Y. H. Thomas Community Center in Hampton, Va. The event, co-sponsored by the Hampton VAMC and the Military Affairs Committee from the city of Hampton, brought together over 150 volunteers to help homeless Veterans.

Stand Down is a military term used during active war to say the soldier will “stand down” from action to get a hot meal, haircut, and clean clothing. The term was adopted for Veterans during the first Homeless Veteran Stand Down organized in 1988 by a group of Vietnam Veterans in San Diego, Ca. Since then, stand downs have been used as an effective method helping homeless Veterans across the nation connect to resources they desperately need.

“I am really impressed with the amount of volunteers who came out to help homeless Veterans,” said Mike Dunfee, Hampton VAMC medical center director. “Collaborations like these are critical to helping Veterans find all the resources that are available to help them.”

The event helped the homeless – those who truly have no roof over their heads – as well as those who are close to being homeless staying with friends, family or in a hotel.

“We’ve got a wide variety of homeless Veterans here,” said Marti Chick-Ebey, homeless coordinator for the Hampton VAMC.

Several Veterans were admitted to the domiciliary program at the medical center. Many others received free meals and picked-up donated winter clothing.

One Veteran at the stand down was Robert Hartley, 43, a Navy Veteran who recently moved to the Hampton Roads area. Hartley only had enough money to make the trip cross county on his old Harley Davidson motorcycle. With no job and no money, Hartley found himself staying on the sofa at a former girlfriend’s house. Hartley’s girlfriend urged him to call the Veteran Homeless Hotline where he was connected with Chick-Ebey.

“During the initial call with Mr. Hartley, I asked him lots of questions about his finances and where he was living,” said Chick-Ebey. “Mr. Hartley told me that he filed a disability claim three years ago when he lived in Phoenix, Ariz. To my surprise, when I checked the system, I saw that his claim had been adjudicated and he was rated 40 percent disabled. I made a few calls to my contacts at the Veterans Benefits Administration and found out they tried to send him his disability check back pay that totaled over \$13,000 and it was returned because he had moved.”



James Coty

A volunteer assists a female Veteran during the Nov. 16 homeless standdown in Hampton, Va.

“I literally don’t know what I would have done without the VA” said Hartley. “When I contacted the people at the Hampton VA, they found out that my claim had been approved and a check was waiting for me for me - that was two days ago.”

When asked what advice he would give to other Veterans, Hartley stated, “Talk to everyone you can, check every resource possible and sooner or later you’ll find the right help. There is help for people limping through life and we are grateful for the help I am getting from the staff at the Hampton VAMC.”

VA Offers Dental Insurance Program To Eligible Veterans

VA is partnering with Delta Dental and MetLife to allow eligible Veterans, plus family members receiving care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA), to purchase affordable dental insurance.

“This new dental program is another example of VA creating partnerships with the private sector to deliver a range of high-quality care for our Nation’s Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

More than 8 million Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care can choose to purchase one of the offered dental plans. This three-year pilot has been designed for Veterans with no dental coverage, or those eligible for VA dental care who would like to purchase additional coverage. Participation will not affect entitlement to VA dental services and treatment.

There are no eligibility limitations based on service-connected disability rating or enrollment priority assignment. As of Nov. 15, people interested in participating may complete an application online through either Delta Dental, www.deltadentalvadip.org, or MetLife, www.metlife.com/vadip. Coverage for this new dental insurance will begin Jan. 1, 2014, and will be available throughout the United States and its territories.

Also eligible for the new benefits are nearly 400,000

spouses and dependent children who are reimbursed for most medical expenses under VA’s CHAMPVA program. Generally, CHAMPVA participants are spouses, survivors or dependent children of Veterans officially rated as “permanently and totally” disabled by a service-connected condition.

Dental services under the new program vary by plan and include diagnostic, preventive, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Enrollment in the VA Dental Insurance Plan (VADIP) is voluntary. Participants are responsible for all premiums, which range from \$8.65 to \$52.90 per month for individual plans. Copayments and other charges may apply.

Historically VA’s free dental services have gone to Veterans with dental problems connected to a medical condition that’s officially certified as “service connected.” Free dental services will continue for those Veterans.

For more information on VADIP, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip, or contact Delta Dental at 855-370-3303 or MetLife at 888-310-1681.

Veterans who are not enrolled in the VA health care system can apply at any time by visiting www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, calling 877-222-VETS (8387) or visiting their local VA health care facility.

Family And Medical Leave Act Coverage Of Same-Sex Spouses

On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional. This ruling impacts the definition of spouse found in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) regulations.

As a result of the Supreme Court decision, Federal employees are now entitled to use FMLA leave to care for a same-sex spouse with a serious health condition (including care for a same-sex spouse who gives birth to a child), to care for a same-sex spouse who is a covered Servicemember with an injury or illness incurred or aggravated in the line of duty on active duty, or for qualifying exigencies while a same-sex spouse is on covered active duty or has been notified of an impend-

ing call or order to covered active duty status in accordance with the statute at 5 U.S.C. chapter 63..

Typically, an employee may not retroactively invoke his or her entitlement to FMLA leave. However, employees who took otherwise-qualifying leave for a same-sex spouse between June 26, 2013, and Oct. 21, 2013, will be permitted to re-designate such time off as FMLA leave. Applications should be made no later than Dec. 15, 2013.

Employees should contact their servicing Human Resources office for additional information regarding changes to FMLA coverage for same-sex spouses and any re-designation of qualifying leave for same-sex spouses between June 26, 2013, and Oct. 21, 2013.

Veterans To Receive 1.5 Percent Cost-Of-Living Increase

Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from VA will receive a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase beginning Jan. 1, 2014.

For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent.

The full rates are available on the Internet at www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp.

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving depen-

dency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits.

Under federal law, cost-of-living adjustments for VA’s compensation and pension must match those for Social Security benefits. The last adjustment was in January 2013 when the Social Security benefits rate increased 1.7 percent.

In fiscal year 2013, VA provided over \$59 billion in compensation benefits to nearly 4 million Veterans and survivors, and over \$5 billion in pension benefits to more than 515,000 Veterans and survivors.

One Million Now Benefit From Post-9/11 GI Bill

VA announced Nov. 8, that 1 million Veterans, Servicemembers, and family members have benefited from the Post-9/11 GI Bill since the program's inception in August 2009.

VBA, which administers the program, has distributed over \$30 billion in the form of tuition and other education-related payments to Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families; and to the universities, colleges, and trade schools they attend.

"This is one of the most important programs helping our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans reach their educational goals and find a good job," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We're proud this important benefit is making such a big difference in the lives of so many Veterans and their families."

VA announced that Steven Ferraro, who is currently attending Middlesex County College, a public community college in Edison, N.J., has been identified as the 1 millionth Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiary. Ferraro served in the Army from 2003-2013 and deployed to Iraq in 2008 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is the father of three and is majoring in communications.

"I thought it was a great privilege to be the one millionth recipient of the GI Bill," said Ferraro. "Coming back to college after leaving the military, it was a great stepping stone for me and my family."

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a comprehensive education benefit created by Congress in 2008. In general, Veterans and service members who have served on active duty for 90 or more days since Sept. 10, 2001 are eligible. On average, VA processes the initial claims for Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits in 23 days.

VA's new automated processing system, called the Long-Term Solution, uses more than 1,600 business

rules to support end-to-end automation of Post-9/11 GI Bill claims, ensuring accurate payments without the need for manual handling, also resulting in quicker processing of education claims.

GI Bill benefits are tiered based on the number of days served on active duty, giving activated National Guard and Reserve members the same benefits as all other active duty members. These benefits include:

- Up to the full amount of tuition and fees for a state-operated college or university. The Yellow Ribbon Program may provide additional assistance for students attending private institutions or who are charged out-of-state tuition and fees;
- Monthly housing allowance, which is based upon the location of the school; and
- Annual books and supplies stipend of up to \$1,000.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill also provides work-study programs, tutorial assistance and license and certification test reimbursement.

Enacted in 1944, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known as the "GI Bill of Rights," recognized that military service was an inherently selfless act which demanded a certain amount of compensation. As a result of the bill, nearly half of the 16 million Veterans of World War II went to school and received an education – helping to rejuvenate the post-war economy and transform not only the lives of Veterans, but the fabric of the nation.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill builds on the same great legacy of the original GI Bill, giving Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and their families a chance to improve their lives and invest in their future through higher education. For more information on VA education benefits go to www.gibill.va.gov/.

VA Meets President's Mental Health Executive Order Hiring Goal

VA has hired 815 Peer Specialists and Peer Apprentices, exceeding the hiring goal set in President Obama's Executive Order aimed at improving access to mental health services for Veterans, service members and military families.

"We have made strong progress to expand Veterans' access to mental health services, but we must continue to increase access," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "These newly hired employees, Veterans themselves, are uniquely equipped to guide fellow Veterans through difficult issues."

Peer Specialists and Peer Support Apprentices are a unique cadre of Veterans who have successfully dealt with their own mental health recovery for a minimum of one year. Peer Specialists are trained and certified, while Peer Support Apprentices are undergoing training and certification to become Peer Specialists. The EO mandated that all training for these peer counselors would be complete by the end of the year. VA remains

on track to meet that requirement.

"We are proud to have exceeded the hiring goal established by the President in his Executive Order," said Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert A. Petzel. "We are well on the way to have all of these new hires trained by the end of the calendar year."

Specialists and apprentices are working at every VA medical center throughout the country as well as at Community-Based Outpatient Clinics with over 10,000 enrollees. VA's push to hire Veterans who can provide peer support is a key part of a greater effort aimed at increasing access to mental health care services for the nation's Veterans by hiring thousands of new mental health professionals.

To learn more about current VA Peer to Peer job opportunities visit www.vacareers.va.gov/peer-to-peer/. Veterans and their families interested in learning more about the mental health services provided by VA can go to www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

VISN 6 Sites of Care & VA Vet Centers

Albemarle POC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252-331-2191

Asheville VAMC
1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911, 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov/

Beckley VAMC
200 Veterans Avenue
Beckley, WV 25801
304-255-2121, 877-902-5142
www.beckley.va.gov/

Brunswick Outreach Clinic
20 Medical Campus Drive
Supply, NC 28462
910-754-6141

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213
704-597-3500

Charlottesville CBOC
650 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Danville CBOC
705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Durham VAMC
508 Fulton St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411, 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov/

Emporia CBOC
1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville VAMC
2300 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120, 800-771-6106
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov

Franklin CBOC
647 Wayah St.
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredricksburg CBOC
130 Executive Center Pkwy
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC
2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27909
919-731-9766

Greenbrier County CBOC
804 Industrial Park Rd.
Maxwelton, WV 24957
304-497-3900

Greenville CBOC
800 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27858
252-830-2149

Hamlet CBOC
100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hampton VAMC
100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961, 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov/

Hickory CBOC
2440 Century Place, SE
Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex
1824 Hillandale Road
Durham, North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC
241 Freedom Way
Midway Park, NC 28544
910-353-6406

Lynchburg CBOC
1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC
5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Raleigh CBOC
3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex
3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Richmond VAMC
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000, 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov/

Robeson County CBOC
139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-521-8452

Rutherford County CBOC
374 Charlotte Rd.
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-288-2780

Salem VAMC
1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463, 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov/

Salisbury VAMC
1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000, 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov/

Staunton CBOC
102 Business Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC
123 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-2526

Village Green Annex
1991 Fordham Drive
Fayetteville, NC 28304
910-488-2120 ext. 4020,

Virginia Beach CBOC
244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961, ext. 1900

Wilmington HCC
1705 Gardner Rd.
Wilmington, NC 28405
910-343-5300

Winston-Salem CBOC
190 Kimel Park Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
336-768-3296

Winston-Salem Annex
2101 Peters Creek Parkway
Winston-Salem, NC 27127
336-761-5300

Wytheville CBOC
165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400

**VA Dialysis and
Blind Rehabilitation Clinics
at Brier Creek**
8081 Arco Corporate Drive
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-286-5220

VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville
2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-483-9727

Beckley Vet Center
1000 Johnstown Road
Beckley, WV 25801
304-252-8220

Charlotte Vet Center
2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Fayetteville Vet Center
4140 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28311
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center
2009 S. Elm-Eugene St.
Greensboro, NC 27406
336-333-5366

Greenville Vet Center
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center
110-A Branchwood Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Norfolk Vet Center
1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Princeton Vet Center
905 Mercer Street
Princeton, WV 24740
304-425-5653

Raleigh Vet Center
1649 Old Louisburg Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-856-4616

Roanoke Vet Center
350 Albemarle Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Virginia Beach Vet Center
324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA, 23452
757-248-3665