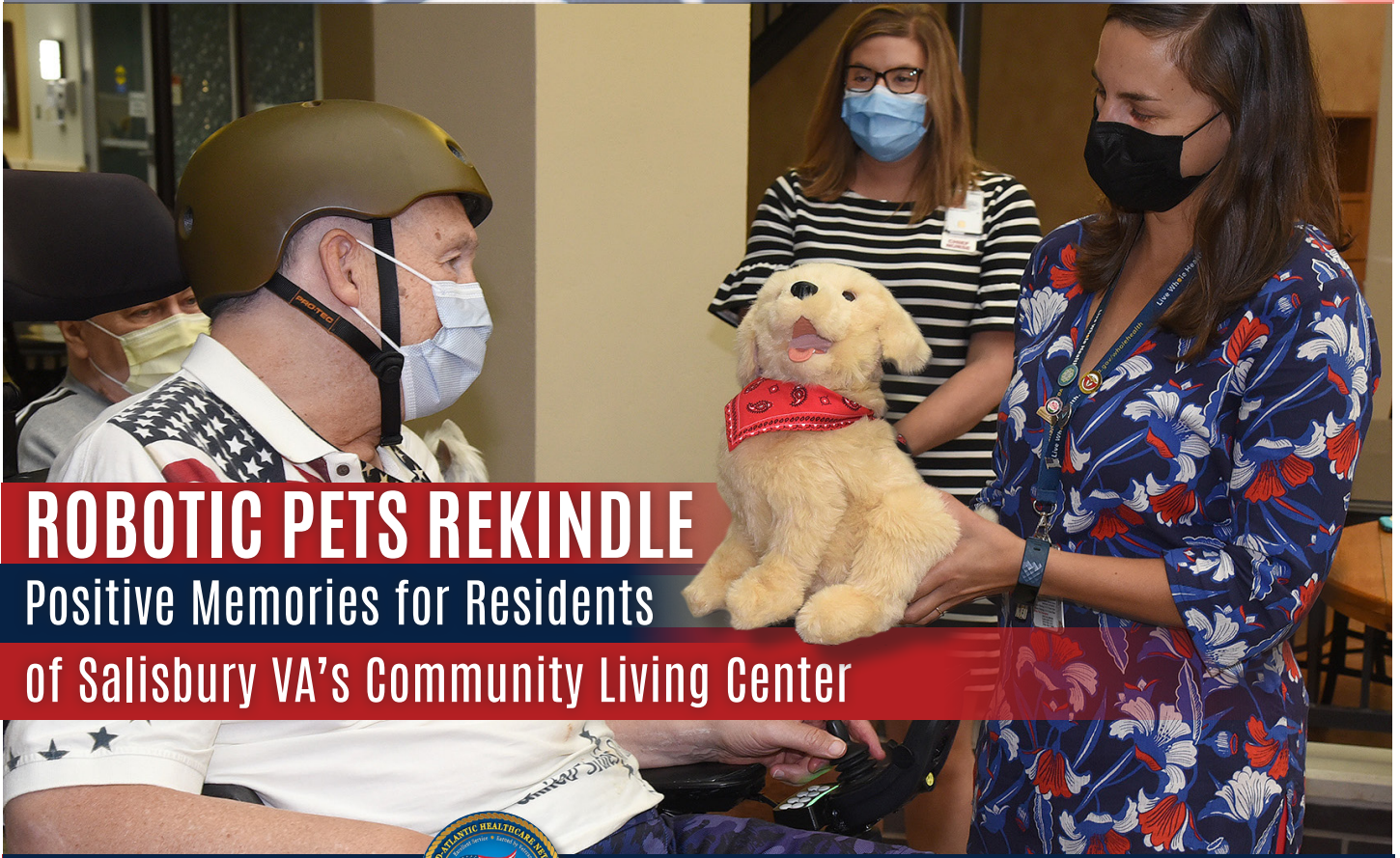


VOICES OF VISN 6

Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here



ROBOTIC PETS REKINDLE Positive Memories for Residents of Salisbury VA’s Community Living Center

Inside This Issue



By Alex Britt | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Staff from Salisbury VA’s Community Living Center (CLC)—which houses the facility’s long-term residents—recently distributed 12 robotic dogs and cats to be shared among CLC and Hospice Veterans. Studies show these animals can be beneficial for a range of older adults.

The Whole Health team partnered with staff from Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) to address health and wellness among the residents.

“These are different from toys or traditional stuffed animals,” said Dr. Christina Vair, psychologist and Whole Health Director. “They are designed to simulate a pet. They blink, move their eyes, and make pleasant noises. They can be especially helpful to patients with dementia but also can benefit individuals without cognitive issues.”

Marine Corps Veteran Richard Hodgin, who was a bit unsure at first about the robotic animals, eventually asked if he could have one. He promptly named it after a beloved pet he’d had many years ago, tucked it under his arm, and soon the Purple Heart recipient was sharing stories from when he was younger.

“We used to have dogs at the house, and they would drive the neighbors crazy,” said Hodgin. “At Least I won’t have to worry about them running away.”

Salisbury VA Director and Navy Veteran Joseph Vaughn watched as the Veter-

TOP PHOTO: Community Living Center (CLC) staff and Salisbury VA senior leaders shown here with CLC residents and their robotic pets. Studies have shown these animals can be beneficial for a range of older adults.

(Continued on page 5)



MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Season's Greetings,

VISN 6 leadership would like to wish you and your family very happy holidays. Whether you are celebrating Hanukkah, Bodhi Day, Christmas, Kwanza, Yule (Winter Solstice), Las Posadas, Lunar New Year, different cultural practices, or no cultural practices, you are in our thoughts during this holiday season.

Our Veterans, employees, and stakeholders are rich in spiritual and cultural diversity, and December is a month that brings an abundance of opportunities to learn and celebrate everyone's traditions. As we enjoy the holiday season, our goal in VISN 6 is to respect and appreciate our colleagues' and Veterans' personal, religious, and cultural practices.

We know that all faiths and traditions commonly share the expression of gratitude. As we close out year two of our COVID-19 pandemic response, we want to thank you for your continued unwavering support of our sacred mission – caring for those who have served in our armed forces.

Though many of us are fortunate to share these celebrations with our family and friends, we must remember that not everyone has that support. Please share the below resources with the Veterans in your life – you never know what may make a difference to them.

- [VA's self-help apps](#): Tools to help deal with common reactions like stress, sadness, and anxiety.
- You can also track your symptoms over time.
- Veterans Crisis Line: If you are having thoughts of suicide, call 1-800-273-8255, then PRESS 1 or visit <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- For emergency mental health care: [call your local VA medical center](#)
- Vet Centers: Discuss how you feel with other Veterans in these community-based counseling centers. 70% of Vet Center staff are Veterans. Call 1-877-927-8387 or find one [near you](#).
- [VA Mental Health Services Guide](#)
- [MakeTheConnection.net](#): information, resources, and Veteran to Veteran videos for challenging life events and experiences with mental health issues.

On behalf of the entire VISN 6 executive leadership team, we are grateful for your devoted service to VA's mission and would like to extend our warmest holiday wishes.



Happy Holidays. I look forward to seeing you in 2022! *

PAUL S. CREWS

MPH, FACHE, VISN 6 Executive Network Director

Just Call Me Ms. Murphy!

By Joshua Edson | DURHAM VAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS



When it comes to Veterans, Dr. Erica Murphy, Durham VA Healthcare System's Assistant Director of Experience, reaches way back, to the skills and values her mother taught her.

"My mother was a respiratory therapist at the VA," says Dr. Murphy. "She would always come home and talk about 'her Veterans.' Seeing her work with her Veterans really inspired me. That's why I really love my job."

Dr. Murphy is the DVAHCS' newest Executive Leadership Team (ELT) member. She joins us from the Memphis VA Medical Center, where she was Chief of the Veterans Experience Office.

The DVAHCS Assistant Director of Experience has multitude of functions at the DVAHCS. In addition to overseeing customer service and employee satisfaction, Dr. Murphy also manages Police Services, Environmental Management Services, Veterans Canteen Service, and Employee Experience Service.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, Navy Spouse, and a Doctoral graduate of Colorado Technical University, Dr. Murphy is not one to let her new position and achievements go to her head.

"Just call me Ms. Murphy," says Ms. Murphy. "My younger sister is a pharmacist, so to me, she's Dr. Murphy."

Ms. Murphy began her federal career service as a "coder" for the United States Postal Service in 2007. After two years at the post office, she then took a position at the Veterans Benefits Administration. It was an opportune time. President Barack Obama had pledged additional federal funding to hire more VBA employees to clear the significant backlog of Veterans' benefits claims.

"I had a guaranteed job for two years, so I basically started at the VA as a temp," laughs Ms. Murphy. "Maybe permanent temp would be a better description, but it was a start."

Once that position ended, she applied for and received a rater position at the VBA, a more secure position. It was there that she received something of an epiphany.

"[My mentor] said that I wasn't going to be successful in my job," says Ms. Murphy. "I was really going over Veterans claims and trying to make sure they were getting everything they were entitled to and apparently that was taking too much time."

Usually, this would be a disheartening thing to hear, and cause a less driven person to quit an organization entirely, but not Ms. Murphy.

"I realized that he was right," she said. "I wasn't going to be successful at that job. I felt that our Veterans deserved everything they were entitled to, not just what they were claiming. For my Veterans, it's all or none."

Her journey eventually took her to the Veterans Health Administration, where she landed a position as the Chief of Customer Service (now Veteran Experience). It was a difficult task, as the Memphis VA Medical Center was working to improve its image among local Veterans.

"There were great people there," she said. "But there was certainly room for improvement. We needed more people, more resources and more time with getting our Veterans the customer service they deserved."

Starting with a staff of 23, Ms. Murphy was able to convince Memphis VA Medical Center Leadership to increase her staff to 43. It was here that Ms. Murphy found her passion. Giving Veterans a more positive VA experience.

"This was it," Ms. Murphy said. "I found my calling. When you find your passion, you'll succeed at whatever you do, and I was happy in my position in Memphis."

But there is always room to grow. When the position for Assistant Director of Experience opened at the DVHACS, Ms. Murphy saw an even bigger opportunity.

"It was as if this position had been created just for me," she said. "Not only did I still get to be a chief, but I was also going to be a member of the executive leadership team. I knew I would be the perfect candidate."

So here Ms. Murphy stands, excited about a position she loves, and full of hope about the contributions she plans to bring to the Employee Experience at the DVHACS.

Ms. Murphy ended saying, "Anyone who knows me, knows this: everyone comes to work to do a good job. Just like myself, I want our staff to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. That's always been the way I see things."



Fayetteville VA Unveils New Wall to Honor State's Medal of Honor Recipients

By Rachael Riley

COURTESY OF THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

The wall at the front of the Fayetteville Veterans Affairs Health Care Center on Raeford Road is no longer blank.

During a recent ceremony Wednesday, officials with the Fayetteville VA Coast Health Care System unveiled a Medal of Honor display dedicated to 30 North Carolinians who have earned the nation's highest military honor.

The wall bears the photos and citations of each recipient.

The idea for the wall started about a year ago with the Fayetteville VA Coastal Health Care System's Diversity Leadership Council who wanted to honor veterans past the VA's mission of caring for veterans, said Daniel Dücker, executive director of the Fayetteville VA.

"They have served in sweltering jungles, choppy seas and arctic cold in the defense of our freedom," Dücker said of the state's Medal of Honor recipients whose names are on the wall. "They are the embodiment of the oath of service that service members take."

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Robert M. Patterson is one of those honorees.

Born April 16, 1948, in Carpenter, North Carolina, Patterson grew up in Fayetteville and attended Massey Hill High School.

"When I was in high school all I was going to be was a dirt farmer because that's where I came from," Patterson said.

Patterson said he did not complete his senior year of high school and joined the Army on Sept. 21, 1966, not because of the Vietnam draft but because a girlfriend made him mad.

He completed basic training at Fort Bragg and decided to attend airborne school because of the extra \$55 in pay he'd earn.

In 1968, at the age of 19, he deployed to Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division's 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry.

As soon as he stepped off the plane in Tan Son Nhut near the city of Saigon, a mortar had just hit the area. On May 6, 1968,

Patterson received a mission that his platoon would go into a village where the Viet Cong was suspected to be located.

The infantry squad that was next to his platoon was annihilated, Patterson said.

Cobra helicopters provided fire in front of the squad, but Patterson said there wasn't a lot of cover to get behind.

"We got hit and the platoon was pinned down," he said.

His platoon sergeant was injured.

Patterson said he doesn't remember the details of what happened next.

According to his award citation, then-Spc. 4th Class Patterson ignored the warnings of comrades and moved into a bunker complex exposing himself to small-arms and grenade fire.

Armed with his M-16 rifle and grenades, he destroyed five enemy bunkers, killed eight enemy soldiers and captured seven weapons.

The next morning his division commander awarded him and others in his squadron the Silver Star.

"I'm thinking to myself, 'Why am I getting this? I didn't do anything,'" Patterson said.

"And that's when we found out we had actually gone up against a reinforcement regiment."

After leaving Vietnam in December 1968, Patterson was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division for a few months.

In 1969, he was called to Corps headquarters to meet with a major and told he was going to Washington D.C. to receive the Medal of Honor.

Patterson said his reaction was "bewilderment."

On Oct. 21, 1969, Patterson, Patrick Brady, Jack Jacobs and James Sprayberry each received the Medal of Honor.

"I was mad 'cause they made me take my jump boots off," Patterson said. "They wanted everybody to be the exact same, and I was airborne and they weren't."

After receiving the Medal of Honor Patterson continued to serve for 26 years, deciding that he didn't want to return to the tobacco

LEFT PHOTO: Medal of Honor recipient Robert Patterson, left, and Dan Dücker cut the ribbon for the Medal of Honor display at Fayetteville VA Health Care Center on Raeford Road. (Andrew Craft, The Fayetteville Observer) **RIGHT PHOTO:** A Medal of Honor display is unveiled during a ceremony at Fayetteville VA Health Care Center on Raeford Road. (Andrew Craft, The Fayetteville Observer.)

fields to be stuck behind a mule, especially since he had a bride to take care of.

Patterson said he didn't receive any special treatment because of having the medal and had to work "twice as hard to convince people" he didn't get promotions because of it.

He said his platoon sergeant, George Wesley Simmons, was the only noncommissioned officer who took an interest in helping Patterson develop as a noncommissioned officer.

One of the lessons Patterson said Simmons taught him was related to correcting soldiers.

Patterson said there was an instance when he wanted to punish a soldier with a 10-mile ruck march on a Saturday.

"George said, 'OK that's fine I got no problem with that. How are you going to make sure he does that? ... You're going have to walk with him to make sure he walks every inch of that 10 miles,'" Patterson said.

Patterson said taking care of soldiers was the best thing he ever accomplished in life, and the second-best thing was taking care of Veterans.

After retiring from the Army, he joined the Department of Veterans Affairs and was a benefits counselor at the VA office in Winston Salem, until retiring from there in 2010.

Reflecting on earning the Medal of Honor decades later, Patterson, 73, said it's harder to wear it than it is to earn it.

"A person who wears the Medal of Honor is not wearing it for themselves," he said. "They're wearing it for everyone who was there and particularly for those who didn't come back."

Staff writer Rachael Riley can be reached at riley@fayobserver.com or 910-486-3528.



Writing and Repaying: Veterans' Blank Checks

Ben Wocken, Hampton | VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

HAMPTON, VA – Veterans write the nation “a blank check” upon joining the military. It covers all their sacrifices, up to and including the ultimate sacrifice: one’s life.

That’s the big-picture point Michael Harper, Hampton VA’s Associate Director of Operations, laid out during one of several Veterans Day ceremonies held on Hampton VA Medical Center campus. Harper, a U.S. Navy retiree, challenged VA staff to do their best to repay veterans for their service.

The high cost paid by many veterans is clearly seen in the hospital’s Spinal Cord Unit (SCU), where residents rehab - learning to lead lives confined by the limits of their damaged bodies. It is here that President Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural words are seen put into action: “to care for [those] who shall have borne the battle...”

“The debt can never be fully repaid.” Harper told staff. “Yet there are big and little things we can do as VA staff to begin to repay it. Saying ‘Thank you’ to veterans is one way,”

which hospital leadership did, attending Veterans Day ceremonies held throughout the facility.

Saying ‘Thank You’

Wheelchair-bound veterans were recognized in a ceremony held in the SCU. Recreational Therapist Paul Burchuk attended. “Today’s event is to celebrate all the sacrifices [our resident veterans] have done for our great country.”

“We have everyone [represented] except for the Coast Guard,” said Burchuk.

Military service recognition certificates were presented to each veteran, then as an all-services musical medley played, Linda Kocaja, an SCI Recreational Therapist, spontaneously waved mini flags representing each branch of service.

Attending as a Veteran

Music and emotions filled the room at an in-person – and simultaneously live-streamed

LEFT PHOTO: Michael Harper, Associate Director of Operations, gives remarks at one of several Veterans Day events on Hampton VA’s campus. (Photo by Ben Wocken) RIGHT PHOTO: Army Veteran – and U.S. Congressman – Bobby Scott stands and salutes along with fellow Veterans at Hampton VA’s Veterans Day recognition event Nov. 10, 2021

– ceremony attended by Hampton City Mayor Donnie Tuck, and U.S. Congressman Bobby Scott.

Scott, a long-serving member on Capitol Hill, did not speak.

Yet he stood when veterans in-attendance were asked to rise and be recognized by branch. Veteran Scott received an honorable discharge for his service in the Massachusetts National Guard and the United States Army Reserve.

Cashing checks with no expiration date

Speaking directly to veterans who receive – and staff who render – healthcare at the ‘VA by the Bay’, Harper restated Lincoln’s 1885 charge: “To the veterans I say, you stand relieved; we have the watch, we’re going to put something on it ... and we’re going to make sure our checks clear.”

Western North Carolina VA Health Care System update | By Vance Janes | WNCVAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS



ASHEVILLE, NC – The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System has been busy lately.

With the recent spike in COVID-19 cases, vaccine efforts returned to the parking lot but included an opportunity for Veterans to also get their flu shots.

The last day for the Flu Shot Drive through service was Dec. 3. Veterans may receive flu shots at scheduled appointments, during their hospital stay or via the Community Care Network:

Option 1: Scheduled appointments. If

you already have a scheduled appointment, you may receive your flu shot at that time. Includes Primary Care, Specialty Care Clinics and the Franklin, Hickory and Rutherford County Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

Option 2: During hospital stays at time of discharge (provider approval)

Option 3: Community Care Network: Enrolled Veterans (active within the past 24 months) can receive a flu shot through the Community Care Network (CCN). CCN in-retail pharmacies or urgent care/walk-in

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Robotic Pets Rekindle Positive Memories

ans interacted with the robotic pets and told stories of his own animals and how they make him feel.

“I have pets myself,” said Vaughn. “And I know the love and joy they bring to one’s life. I am excited that the CLC residents have the opportunity to receive these pets and hopefully it will bring a smile to their faces.”

Vair said one of the main benefits to having robotic pets is reminiscence therapy.

“It engages them in reminiscing,” she said. “Some of our patients may not remember what happened to them yesterday, but they have vivid memories about their childhood. Robotic pets serve as a prompt for patients and staff to engage on a more personal level. It opens the door to more conversations as they reflect on happy memories or life experiences.”

Vair and GEC leadership believe these pets have great potential, especially given the additional isolation that COVID-19 has created for our Veterans.

“Regarding social isolation, a number of studies show that giving people in a nursing home something to take care of improves their mood,” she said. “Being able to care for something or show affection has been demonstrated to increase quality of life.”

The pets already have been effective in reducing a resident’s worry when distressed. This resident even took the pet to a medical appointment for comfort. Whole Health continues to work to improve the lives of CLC Veterans by purchasing additional items such as raised garden beds, sound machines, sensory aids, and an indoor golf simulator.

“We’re going to continue to do all we can to enhance the lives of our long-term residents,” said Vaughn. “Sometimes seemingly minor changes make the biggest difference.”



Robotic pets such as these recently were distributed to residents of Salisbury VA’s Community Living Center.



Tanyia Jones, Salem VA Health Care Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator, Bill Chase, Elks Lodge 197 Secretary (USN 1961-1964); Barbara and Vince Brandtner, both Past Exalted Rulers of Elks 197, and Jeff Doyle, HUD-VASH Coordinator in front of items purchased with the donation from Elk’s Lodge 197.

Roanoke Elks Lodge Donates \$2,000 of Supplies To Homeless Veteran Stand Down

By Rosaire Bushey | SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

More than three dozen homeless Veterans made their way to the Salem Civic Center Nov. 9 to take part in Stand Down for Homeless Veterans, a program run through the combined efforts of the Salem VA Health Care System, Department of Labor, Total Action for Progress, and the Virginia Employment Commission.

The modified event allowed homeless Veterans to access information on housing and employment, COVID-19, flu, and Hepatitis A vaccinations, as well as access to coats, shoes, winter and comfort items. A boxed meal was also provided. In addition to support provided by the Department of Labor to run the event, the Roanoke Elk’s Lodge #197 supported the Veterans by purchasing \$2,000 worth of essentials to be distributed.

“Through our national foundation, we have applied for and received grants of \$2,000 for the last three years to help support the Stand Down,” said Barbara Brandtner, Past Exalted Ruler of Lodge 197. “This year we called Tanyia and asked for a wish list, and then we went and bought those things.”

The wish list included items such as blankets, pillows, pots and pans, can openers and other household essentials that people often don’t consider.

“We’re trying to find housing for our homeless Veterans, and people often donate canned food and other items, all of which are important and appreciated,” said Tanyia

Jones social worker and Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Coordinator with the Salem VA HCS. “But we often forget you need a way to open those cans. The continued support of the Elk’s Lodge 197 has been transformative in what we are able to do to decrease the number of Veteran Homeless in the area.”

This is the third consecutive year of Lodge 197’s substantial donation, and the Elks are looking forward to being able to continue to help.

“Over the years, Lodge 197 has donated more than \$9 million within the local area,” said long-time lodge secretary and US Navy Veteran Bill Chase. “Lodge 197 has been active since 1891, and we are dedicated to Veteran causes and are hoping to work more closely not just with the Salem VA Health Care System but with other Veterans as well.”

Vince Brandtner, husband of Barbara and also a Past Exalted Ruler of Lodge 197, said, “Veterans have been a priority to us for a long time. We used to hold a cook-out and ice cream social here twice a year, and we look forward to being able to do that again for the Veterans here and at the Virginia Veterans Care Center next door.”

The Stand Down is part of a US Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supporting Housing (HUD-VASH) initiative to help homeless Veterans and their families find and sustain permanent housing.

After Months in ICU Battling COVID, Vet Ready for Next Chapter

Story by David Hodge | RICHMOND VA, CVHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Ed called it. He said he would return to meet and thank the staff who cared for him. Although everyone hoped this would come true, the odds at times were stacked against him. Yet, Ed Coleman's return to the place he spent six months battling COVID-19 was, arguably, as therapeutic for the clinicians as it was for him and Charlene, his wife.

In late September, it finally happened. A small reunion at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) in Richmond, gave staff who cared for Ed, and grew to know Charlene, the opportunity to celebrate his recovery.

"It was a completion of the circle," Charlene explained. "He was happy to be able to thank the medical staff who helped save his life. It was an extremely uplifting experience, I believe, for the staff and for my husband."

When Ed began to feel bad early in the pandemic, he tried to tough it out, a trait undoubtedly forged while serving with the 7th Special Forces Group in the Vietnam War. Ultimately, he reached a point where breathing became too difficult. It was at this time, they sought help at CVHCS.

At the height of his illness, Ed spent a six-week period in the intensive care unit in an induced coma, intubated and fighting a case of double pneumonia. Throughout the experience, Charlene visited him often and developed a relationship with several clinicians who cared for her husband.

"They were kind and considerate and did not seem to be bothered talking to me daily," she recalled. "They treated Ed very well. The medical

staff and Ed became friends. They made him feel that his well-being was important to them, and it was."

One day, a physical therapist caring for Ed organized an opportunity for Charlene to see him. The therapist made a sign that read "I love you Charlene" and ensured Ed was waiting at his window.

"It had been quite some time since they'd seen one another, so it was a very special moment to witness," said Rizelle Baul, an occupational therapist who cared for Ed.

Charlene, an author, kept notes throughout Ed's stay. At the reunion, she donated a few dozen copies of her latest book, titled "Surviving COVID." The book chronicles their experience while Ed was sick, at a time during the pandemic when effective treatments were unknown, and vaccines were unavailable.

"To see him walking unassisted and healthier brings the rehab process full circle for me and my peers," Baul stated. "Opportunities like this don't come often."

Ed and Charlene have traveled extensively over the years, visiting parts of the Caribbean and Africa, taking their shared experience in the TV production industry to places few cameras had been before.

"Ed and I enjoy adventures," Charlene stated. "We are not shy and usually approach new challenges with an anticipation of a positive outcome. This is why I knew Ed would live and survive COVID-19."



Ed Coleman, Vietnam Veteran, hugs a staff member from the Central Virginia VA Health Care System. Coleman spent about six months in the hospital in 2020 battling COVID. He came back to the hospital to celebrate his recovery with the staff who cared for him. (Photo by Jason Miller, Visual Information Specialist)



Ed and Charlene Coleman (fourth and third from the right, respectively) visit with staff members at Central Virginia VA Health Care System. Ed, a Vietnam Veteran, battled COVID for several months in the hospital. Charlene wrote a book about the experience titled "Surviving COVID." (Photo by Jason Miller, Visual Information Specialist)

VA Secretary McDonough Visits Salisbury VA, Highlights Improved Veteran Access, Staff Appreciation, Vaccines, Suicide Prevention

Story by Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS



VA Secretary Denis McDonough greets Salisbury VA Medical Center staff during a tour of the vaccine clinic (Photos by Luke Thompson)

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough recently visited Salisbury VA Medical Center as part of his trip to address Vietnam Veterans of America at a national convention in Greensboro, NC.

After his executive briefing, which consisted of topics such as the challenges Salisbury VA Health Care System faces recruiting nurses, the Secretary moved on to a facility tour that included a demonstration of wide-awake hand surgeries by Dr. Jeffrey Baker.

These procedures allow Dr. Baker to do much more than he could if the surgeries were performed in

the operating room. No anesthesia is used and all of the pre/post-operation formalities may be avoided, which allows Veterans to be in and out in under 15 minutes. They even can drive themselves home.

"It's incredible how this surgical innovation has improved access by reducing the amount of time required to do these procedures," said McDonough.

These surgeries have been performed for quite some time at Salisbury VA, but they were done in the operating room. Recently, these surgeries were made available at the Charlotte VA Health Care Center, with just a local anesthetic. Since one third of Salisbury VA's surgical referrals come from the Charlotte area, it was a logical choice to offer these wide-awake

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New Recommendations Encourage Lung Cancer Screenings For Younger People

Story by David Hodge | RICHMOND VA, CVHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) team of highly specialized nurse navigators, cardiothoracic surgeons and oncologists urged Veterans to get screened in November, which was Lung Cancer Awareness Month, and throughout the year.

The fact is that people who smoke are at higher risk of being diagnosed with lung cancer. As they age, the risk increases.

According to [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), Veterans tend to smoke more and are likely to have worse tobacco and non-tobacco risk factors than the general public.

This year, a national task force updated recommendations for lung cancer screening to further reduce lung cancer mortality and address racial disparities among high-risk groups. If Veterans are between the age of 50-80 with a heavy smoking history, they are encouraged to talk to their primary care physician. These recommendations lower the age range five years for smokers who have smoked a pack a day or more for twenty years.

Dr. Peter Lee, the CVHCS Director of Bronchoscopy and Interventional Pulmonology, says certain racial groups are more likely to be diagnosed at an earlier age.

"We treat Veterans who have significant socioeconomic disparities," Lee said. "High-risk groups experience socioeconomic disadvantages because of a higher prevalence of smoking, environmental exposures, and limited access to care."

CVHCS' Screening Program

Last year, the team detected 22 occurrences of cancer. Of those, 13 were found at stage I or stage

II. Without early screening, nearly 75% of lung cancers are found at advanced stages. If diagnosed early, Veterans can achieve five-year survival rates of up to 92%.

Robin Willingham, a registered nurse and lung cancer screening nurse navigator at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's (CVHCS) Richmond campus, shares the importance of eligible Veterans getting screened for lung cancer.

"With the updated recommendations from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), a greater number of Veterans who are at risk for lung cancer are eligible for enrollment into our screening program," said Willingham. "This is of particular importance for women and minorities, who have been shown to develop lung cancer at an earlier age and with a lesser smoking history."

Willingham says that many times, people who get diagnosed with lung cancer are already experiencing symptoms such as unexplained weight loss, increasing shortness of breath, or coughing up blood. Often at this point the cancer is already at an advanced stage or has already spread to other parts of the body.

"If we can detect lung cancer prior to the veteran experiencing symptoms it gives us a better chance of early detection, treatment, and potential cure," Willingham said.

The comprehensive program provides education on early detection, tobacco cessation counseling, and maintenance of an active patient registry.

For more information, visit:

- USPSTF Recommendation
- VA's National [Oncology Program](#)

Excellence in Service



Robin Willingham, a registered nurse and lung cancer screening nurse navigator at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's (CVHCS) Richmond campus, joined the CVHCS team in January 2018, and worked in endoscopy and pulmonary medicine prior to entering her current role. She joined the team as a civilian noting, "I am not a Veteran. My parents discouraged me from joining any [military] branch out of fear for my safety. I enjoy working at the VA, though, because I know freedom and our rights come at a cost. I could never fully repay service members for their time away from family, accepting possible threats to their safety, or the other sacrifices they have made. My only option for repayment is the service I can provide as a nurse."



Dr. Alex Neuwelt is a clinical doctor and researcher in the Hematology and Oncology Clinic at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) in Richmond, VA. He serves alongside a multi-disciplinary team of doctors, including pulmonologists, surgeons, radiation oncologists to deliver outstanding care to Veterans with cancer. Neuwelt has served Veterans for nine years, three at CVHCS. "It is an honor to help care for the men and women who served in the Armed Forces," Neuwelt said. His father served as a lieutenant commander in the Public Health Service. "I greatly enjoy hearing the military stories of our Veterans that shaped the course of U.S. history and protected our freedom. Every Veteran I treat has unique and impactful stories to tell."



Dr. Julliard Walker is a thoracic surgeon at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System, Richmond campus. He grew up in Anchorage, Alaska and left for the "lower 48" states to go to college. He performed his general surgery training at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. When Walker is not performing life-saving surgery at CVHCS, he is an assistant professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery at VCU and a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves. "Being in the military myself, and having family in the military, I am aware of the difficulties that can affect Veterans. I want the absolute best care for my family, and for our Veterans. There is no group of patients that are more rewarding to care for than Veterans, and it keeps me loving my job."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

procedures there.

"Since we began doing these, I would guess we've done more than any VA in the country," said Baker. "It really is a revolutionary thing that we're doing for carpal tunnel and trigger finger issues."

The availability of the procedure at the Charlotte HCC helps demonstrate the extensive capabilities of equipment and staff available to Veterans in the Charlotte area.

"We're going to do whatever we can to improve access to care, whether that's streamlining a procedure or bringing the care to another facility like we're doing in Charlotte," said Salisbury VA Health Care System Director Joseph Vaughn.

But at the heart of the Secretary's visit was the Salisbury VA staff.

"The reason I'm here is to underscore

to our team the great appreciation I have for them and for their professionalism," said McDonough.

The Secretary also noted outpatient Veteran satisfaction scores were over 90 percent and made it a point to speak about vaccines.

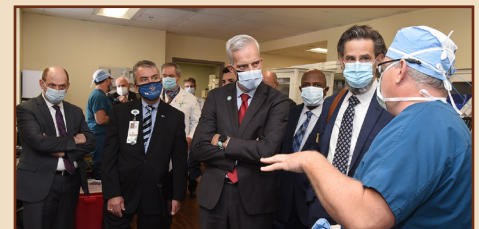
"If you've had your first two shots, come in and get your booster," he said. "If you have questions about it, contact us and we'll make sure we get in touch with you. By the way, if you come in and get your booster, you can also get your flu vaccine. We're anticipating a tough flu season, so we want to make sure people get their flu vaccines."

Lastly, the Secretary addressed Veteran suicide, which continues to be a top priority of the administration.

"My message to Veterans is if you are in crisis, please reach out," he said. "You can

reach us through the Veterans Crisis Line (800) 273-8255 and also reach us through your local VA. Even if you're not in crisis now, don't wait ... reach out. If you go to www.va.gov/reachout we'll make sure you get access to good planning guidance and what's available in terms of mental health services."

VA Secretary Denis McDonough listens intently as Dr. Jeffrey Baker discusses the benefits of wide-awake hand surgery during the Secretary's recent visit to Salisbury VA Medical Center. (Photos by Luke Thompson)



Puerto Rico Bound: Vet Center Mobile Health Unit to Provide Mental Health Services Across the Island

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A Charlotte Vet Center Mobile Health Clinic recently made a stop at the Charlotte VA Health Care Center en route to Puerto Rico. During its stop, leaders from Salisbury VA Health Care System and Charlotte Vet Center talked partnerships, goals, and how the VA and Vet Centers benefit one another.

Vet Centers, which began in 1979, strictly serve combat Veterans. Its staff see Veterans in their brick-and-mortar facility but much of their work is done out in the community.

“We do outreach in rural areas and do counseling as needed,” said Air Force Veteran Lance Nelson, Veterans Outreach program specialist for Charlotte Vet Center. “It’s our job to get out in the community and find those needs.”

The Vet Center is comprised of social workers, psychologists, licensed professional counselors, and now licensed marriage and family therapists. Its staff treats the entire family, not just the Veteran.

“We work with combat Veterans and Veterans who have military sexual trauma as well as provide bereavement counseling for family members who lost a loved one while serving on active duty,” he said.

Nelson’s aim is to increase knowledge

among the community and VA about Vet Center programs and how the two organizations benefit one another.

“My goal is to make sure VA frontline workers are aware of the Vet Center programs,” he said. “We do secondary mental health counseling and we request the Veteran have a primary care provider or a psychiatrist at the VA to prescribe medication.”

Charlotte Vet Center Director Chauncey McLeod said his main role is to get out in the community to let everyone know the Vet Center’s mission.

“It’s a symbiotic relationship that when functioning properly can truly enhance Veteran care,” he said. “It’s that one team, one VA.”

For instance, Vet Center counselors can supplement mental health care and free up VA staff to see more patients in a timelier manner.

“The majority of our Veterans are getting care from either Salisbury VA or Charlotte HCC,” said McLeod. “We spend a lot of time talking back and forth with VA providers to best meet the needs of the Veterans. It’s not us and them ... it’s we.”

Salisbury VA Director Joseph Vaughn concurs and appreciates the partnership between the two organizations.

“Having the mobile outreach capabilities the Vet Center has and being able to go out into communities and rural areas to access Veterans—especially those with PTSD—is huge,” said Vaughn. “This gives many Veterans



Charlotte Vet Center’s Mobile Health Unit makes a pit stop at the Charlotte VA Health Care Center prior to being deployed to Puerto Rico. (Photo by Luke Thompson)



Senior leaders from Salisbury VA Health Care System join Charlotte Vet Center leaders to tour the Mobile Health Unit prior to its deployment to Puerto Rico. The unit will help provide rural outreach to Veterans on the island. (Photo by Luke Thompson)

access to counseling and family services that they may not otherwise have.”

Vet Centers have 80 mobile health clinics nationwide. This one headed to Puerto Rico will arrive toward the end of November and help staff reach rural Veterans all over the island.

“We’re really fortunate to have tools like this available to make sure our Veterans get the care they need,” said Vaughn. “In the end, that’s really what it’s all about.”

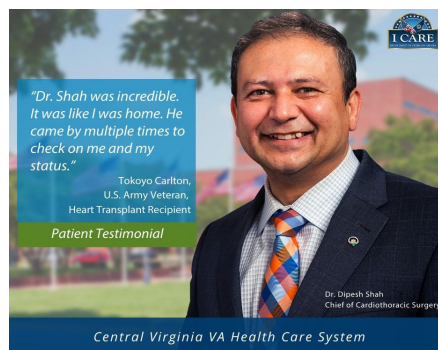
CVHCS’ Heart Transplant Program: Serving Vets for over 40 years

Story by David Hodge
RICHMOND VA, CVHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) heart transplant program has a long history of providing transplant services to Veterans. In fact, VA’s first heart transplant program was created in Richmond more than 41 years ago by Dr. Szabolcs Szentpetery.

Today, the high-quality care and state-of-the-art technology continues under the leadership of Dr. Dipesh Shah, chief of cardiothoracic surgery and surgical director of cardiac transplantation.

“From diagnosis to follow up care, Veterans can expect our team to provide consistent, compassionate care,” Shah explained. “Our program was the first of its kind in VA, and I



am certain it remains the best.”

Approximately 12 staff make up the cardiac surgery team, and they are all highly specialized in their field and approach to transplant surgery. From the first consult to each annual checkup after the transplant, the cardiac

surgery team remains committed to ensuring care coordination is a top priority.

“From my front door to the VA medical center, it was a very smooth process,” said Roger Boxwell, U.S. Navy Veteran who served from 1973 to 1975. “They had it all planned out.”

Boxwell, a recipient of a heart transplant at CVHCS in December 2020, sat on the waiting list for approximately three years before he finally got the call.

“It was a very long road, and I’m so glad to be at the end of it,” Boxwell stated. “I’m so appreciative of the VA for this heart transplant.”

The Heart Transplant Team at CVHCS is proud of the care they’ve delivered to our Nation’s Heroes over the past four decades. More information can be found at <https://www.va.gov/richmond-health-care/>.



VA Breaks Ground on nation's largest Veteran clinic

Community leaders and Veterans from the Fredericksburg, Va. area officially broke ground, Nov. 4, on what will become the nation's largest Veterans clinic.

The event, which was kept small due to COVID, was hosted by the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS), and welcomed local Veterans organizations, elected officials from state and federal government, and the Department of Defense.

"Days like today don't happen from a single point or a single effort," said Rep. Rob Wittman, U.S. Representative in Virginia's 1st District. "It happens with the community."

Officially named the Fredericksburg Health Care Center (HCC), the four-story clinic will span over 470,000 square feet and is expected to serve more than 29,000 Veterans annually.

Once complete, the facility will bring many expanded services to Veterans, including primary care, mental health care, specialty care, pharmacy, and diagnostic imaging. New specialty care services are expected to include pulmonary, gastroenterology, cardiology, dermatology, audiology, pain services, neurology, and physical therapy.

J. Ronald Johnson, Executive Director at CVHCS, reflected on the significance of the groundbreaking, so close to Veterans Day.

"The intent was to remember why we are here; it's for our Veterans," Johnson said. "This region of Virginia is one of the fastest growing for Veterans in the whole country."

CVHCS has seen significant growth in the Fredericksburg area over the past few years, and it is anticipated to grow even more in the future.

PHOTO ABOVE: Leaders from many state, local and federal government entities lift shovels full of dirt at a groundbreaking ceremony, Nov. 4 to signify the beginning of construction on the Dept. of Veterans Affairs' Fredericksburg Health Care Center. Pictured are: Capt. Drew Bigby (left), Chief of Staff, Navy's National Capital Region Market Office; Jim Delgado, Air Force Veteran and former Director of VA Voluntary Services from 1992-2005; J. Ronald Johnson, Executive Director of the Central Virginia VA Health Care System; Dr. Rustom Khouri, President and CEO of Carnegie Management and Development Corporation; Rep. Rob Wittman, U.S. Representative, Virginia, 1st District; Virginia's Sen. Bryce Reeves, 17th Senatorial District; and Lisa Gregory, Chapter 7, Disabled American Veterans. (Photo by Jason Miller, Visual Information Specialist)

The number of Veterans served by CVHCS has increased by about 31% since 2017, and the women Veteran population has grown by 56% during that same period.

The Fredericksburg HCC is located at 5313 Jefferson Davis Highway and is expected to be open by late 2024.

Honors for DVAHCS Nurse Practitioners

The collaborative partnership of the Durham VA Health Care System and Duke University School of Nursing held its 9th Annual Advanced Practice Provider (APP) Symposium on Friday November 5, 2021. This was an all-day virtual conference with poster and podium presentations on a variety of clinical topics and provided continuing education credit to a national audience or nearly 1000 clinicians. For the second year, the memorial Karen Lorne award was given to a Durham VA Nurse Practitioner (NP). This year two NPs were awarded the honor-Bernadette Pablo's (dermatology) and LaDonna Thomas (Durham VA lead NP.) It was an exciting and successful day thanks to a dedicated planning committee, and it was a great way to kick off the 2021 national NP week, November 7-13th. Thank you to all Nurse Practitioners and the wonderful care you provide to our nation's Veterans!



Bernadette Pablo, left, and Dr. LaDonna Thomas.

Veterans Get Their Jobs at Greenville HCC

By Joshua Edson | DVAHCS INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to do our part to help reduce the spread of flu in our community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the flu shot can significantly reduce the impact of contagious respiratory illnesses, freeing up vital health care resources in the fight to contain the Coronavirus.

To accomplish this, providers at the Greenville VA Health Care Center (GHCC) realized that they needed to get as many Veterans through the doors and vaccinated as possible. So they came up with a novel approach -- don't bring Veterans through the doors at all, have a drive-through flu clinic and give Veterans their jabs, without Veterans leaving their vehicles.

"We felt that meeting them in the parking lot was the best option and made it easier for our Veterans," says Dr. Dee Dinsdale, a nurse practitioner and Chief Nurse of the Greenville HCC. "We realized we needed to think outside of the box."

Not content with simply giving Veterans a jab during busy work weeks, Greenville staff took their clinic a step further. They decided to hold the events on Saturday, making it even

easier for Veterans with busy schedules during the week to come by for their flu shot.

"While Coronavirus is more contained than it was a year ago, the threat of transmission is still there," says Dr. Dinsdale. "Rather than having Veterans coming through the center throughout the week, we felt it would be easier for our staff and our Veterans to have them come at a time when we can focus one-hundred-percent on getting our Veteran vaccinated against the flu."

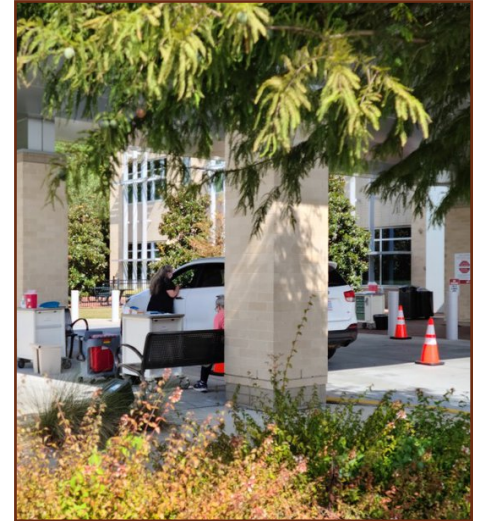
Originally, the plan for the flu clinic was to only do a few Saturdays. But when large numbers of Veterans came by, Greenville providers decided to extend the service, throughout October and into November. November 20th is the final Saturday.

"What struck me was that many Veterans were making their flu shots a kind of social event," says Dr. Dinsdale. "I can't tell you how many times Veterans would say, 'we were meeting for coffee and decided to convoy over to get our flu shots,' it was really something special and it really made for a successful event."

And that success shows in the numbers. Between the Saturday and regular flu clinic

hours, some 700 Greenville area Veterans have received their flu shots. This is much needed protection while COVID-19 remains a threat.

"It just seemed like the right thing to do and Saturday fit my schedule" says Marcial Yulen, a Greenville area Army and OEF/OIF Veteran. "If the Greenville VA does it next year, I'll be there."



A Greenville VA Nurse discusses the flu vaccine with a Veteran during a Saturday drive-through flu clinic. The Greenville VA Health Care Center hosted several Saturday, drive through flu clinics during October and November.

Fayetteville NC VA Nurse Receives state nursing recognition

By GiGail Cureton

FAYETTEVILLE NCVAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Jermecka Covington, a Fayetteville NC VA Coastal Health Care System registered nurse, has been named the 2021 Rookie of The Year by the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA).

The annual award is given by the NCNA board of directors to a nurse who has been an association member less than two years and excels at promoting a positive image of nursing and the professional organization to peers and consumers. She was honored at an awards luncheon during the NCNA 114th annual convention in Concord in September.

"It's a very humbling experience," Covington said about winning the award. "Receiving such a prestigious award, allowed me the opportunity to reflect over the many obstacles that God has equipped me to overcome. Also, I thought about the opportunity I have to impact Veterans [patients] and my students through my dedication and commitment to the nursing profession."

Covington established herself as some-



Jermecka Covington, a Fayetteville NC VA Coastal Health Care System registered nurse, was named the 2021 Rookie of The Year by the North Carolina Nurses Association. In this photo, Covington (left) accepts the award from Meka Douthit EL, President, North Carolina Nurses Association.

one other nurses look towards for leadership, advice, and support. Until 2020, however, she had not been an NCNA member. When membership was suggested at a faculty meeting, she jumped in with both feet and soon had joined the South-Central Advisory Committee, organized a regional event, was showing up at the NC General Assembly to support the SAVE Act, and had written a letter to the editor on the same issue, all while continuing to expand her volunteering in the community,

the NCNA wrote in its press release announcing the award.

Until recently, Covington worked as the lead RN under the Chief of Staff assisting with the Referral Coordination Initiative. Now her attention is focused on caring for COVID patients at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center. She is also adjunct nursing faculty at the University of North Carolina-Pembroke.

"I wanted to work at the VA because this gives me an opportunity to give back to those who served our country," she said. "Nursing is my passion and my calling. It's what I have strived to be since the age of 11, when my mother stated that I would make a great nurse. My hope is that nurses like myself will continue to be valued each day."

According to Debra Young, Associate Director of Patient Care Services, having a member of the Fayetteville nursing staff being recognized by the association says a lot about the caliber of nurses the VA seeks to attract. "Nursing is a calling and nurses like Ms. Covington are vital to ensuring that we fulfill our mission of caring for the men and women who have given so much to this nation."

Western North Carolina VA Health Care System update | By Vance Janes | WNCVAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

care locations (standalone visit) will provide flu shots at no cost with no copayment. Retail pharmacy examples are CVS Pharmacy and Walmart Pharmacy.

“Charles George VA Medical Center has moved its COVID-19 vaccines shot clinics back to the parking lot to handle the caseload and to expedite service to its Veterans,” Amanda Graves, COVID-19 vaccine coordinator here, said.

The shot clinic is now made up of tents for booster shots, and first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“We are now offering first, second, third and Booster doses for our Veterans,” Graves said. “We’re offering Moderna, Pfizer, & J&J vaccines.”

According to Graves, Veterans can make an appointment by calling Primary Care or by texting “Vaccine” to 50739.

“We’re taking drive-ups, but we do encourage appointments,” she said.

- As of Nov. 15, a total of **10,596 flu shots have been provided.**
- COVID Vaccine Update:
- As of Dec. 2, **14,617 first doses have been provided**
- **12,904 second doses have been provided**
- **276 third doses have been provided, and**
- **6,135 booster doses have been given.**

Operating Room Suite Update

CGVAMC is also moving forward with construction efforts to expand and renovate the operating room suite which will improve availability of care for Veterans.

According to Nadia Elkaissi, Facility Management Service Chief, the project includes an 8,500-foot addition on the roof adjacent to the existing operating room suite.

This work involves five large operating rooms, an access corridor to the new ORs, and a new area for storing sterile supplies and equipment, Elkaissi wrote in an email. “After

this project we will have a total of nine (operating rooms).”

The renovated or additional operating rooms will be twice as large as the largest OR currently being used.

The additional space will provide the latest technological equipment and space for staff to safely move around in the room.

“More Operating Rooms means more procedures, state of the art facilities, and a more flexible schedule,” Elkaissi added.

Audiology and Speech Pathology Update

CGVAMC’s audiology and speech pathology department is now open for 100 percent capacity and scheduled appointments.

The department will be expanding coverage of hearing tests for established patients using automated audiometry equipment which is expected to be delivered in the next few weeks.

The department is also expecting to be onboarding a new Audiology supervisor at the beginning of December.

Innovation

The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is proud to announce that Caitlin Rawlins is a winner in the Shark Tank Competition for innovation.

Her entry centered on the use of virtual reality to combat pain and anxiety management.

“This is a really big accomplishment,” Stephanie Young, WNC VA Health Care System Executive Director, said. “There were only 10 winners across the nation!”

New staff announcements: New Chief of Surgical Service

The Executive Office is happy to announce that Dr. Adrien Wang has been selected as the Chief of Surgical Service for the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System.

Dr. Wang has served the WNCVAHCS for the last two years as the Chief of Anesthesiology



Dr. Adrien Wang

and the Assistant Chief of Surgical Service. He brings with him a variety of experience not only as a Doctor of Medicine but also as a Doctor in Bioengineering with a background as an Electrical Engineer.

New Director of our Home-Based Primary Care and NIC programs

“I am pleased to announce that Ms. Shannon Peters, has accepted an offer to become the Director of our HBPC and NIC programs,” Young said. “We had multiple high-quality candidates apply for the HBPC/NIC Director position, each with impressive accomplishments, attractive personal qualities, and bright futures. In selecting Ms. Peters, we expect our tradition of doing HBPC and NIC right, and doing it together, to continue.”

New Primary Care Assistant Nurse Manager

Stephanie Godfrey, BSN, RN, has been named Assistant Nurse Manager for Primary Care 3. Godfrey has been a nurse for 13 years, with nine years in progressive care and four years in primary care.

Civility Coin Honors Positive Values and Collaboration

Story and photo by Scott Pittillo

FOR ASHEVILLE VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Politeness, courtesy, and respect are behaviors we try to show one another, even though we don’t expect an award for it. Yet, taking a moment to be kind can turn someone’s whole day around.

Well, Asheville’s Western North Carolina VA Health Care System (WNCVAHCS) Veteran-Centered Care Committee (VCC) recently decided to recognize people for kind behavior. Employees can nominate coworkers for the distinction. Ultimately, an award will go to the service reaping the most nominations for employees who exemplify positive behaviors.

The concept is simple, really. Civility reinforces society’s positive values and helps create a pleasant and stable work environment. It makes the organization more interconnected and productive. Recognition reinforces the behavior.

The committee decided to award a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



VA employee Justin Jamison accepted the new Asheville VA Challenge Coin from Western North Carolina Engineering students, who made the item using a three-dimensional printing process.

coin to the top service, similar to military traditions where leaders hand out individual challenge coins for on-the-spot recognition. The coins help create a sense of “esprit de corps” within the unit, and there’s often a lot of competition between members to collect them.

Justin Jamison, WNCVAHCS Learning Resources Administrative Officer, worked with Western Carolina University to create a coin. Jamison reached out to his contact at the college and they referred him to Dr. Patrick Gardner from the WCU Engineering Program. Gardner just happens to be a Veteran, and thought it would be a great project for WCU students.

First, Jamison and Gardner developed teams to design the coin. They used artwork depicting the medical center and other things to give it a unique look.

“I always perceived it as the interlocking hands signified how our VA community has a commitment to provide kindness, politeness, and courtesy to one another as it is a direct reflection on the health of our community, both inside and out. The CGVAMC side of the coin signifies the structure to which this civility is displayed by both Veterans and civil servants,” Jamison said.

After they agreed on the design, they moved on to how they were going to make it.

The WCU engineering students worked through some technical challenges, finally shifting to a new technology 3-D printing

process, using resins, that resulted in a finished project meeting everyone’s expectations.

WCU Intern Neil Lukowski helped guide the team on the project and said the coin incorporates all of their engineering design skills and the latest technology the students had available to them, while still retaining a crafted, artistic nature.

The project combined the talents of more than eight students, each bringing their own special skills to the table – whether it was lathes, 3D printing or painting. Lukowski considers it Engineering at its best; using technical know-how and collaboration to solve a problem and find a solution, by moving through different ideas to reach the result.

From a VA team-building perspective the project also served to foster those same attributes. The VVC had to work out how to best recognize employees who were embodying positive values and came up with a community partnership to create an outstanding award.

“It was a great idea and a great partnership, but best of all it fosters an environment that makes VA a place where Veterans want to go” said Jamison.

The coin will annually honor the service line receiving the most nominations. Individuals nominated throughout the year will be recognized with a photo and a certificate.

Second Wind For Veterans

By Joshua Edson | DVAHCS INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021, was the Great American Smokeout, and the message to Veterans from the Durham VA Healthcare System (DVHACS) is that there is help and hope for Veterans looking to quit their smoking habits.

“We take a whole health approach to helping Veterans quit their tobacco use,” says Antonia Rover, a clinical social worker at DVAHCS and member of the Employee Health Committee. “This means that we give them different quitting options. That includes counseling, medications and follow-up.”

Since 1977, when the American Cancer Society took the idea of a smoke free day nationwide, the Great American Smokeout has had great success in highlighting the dangers and health-risks involved with prolonged tobacco use. According to American Cancer Society’s statistics, more than 480,000 Americans die from smoking related illnesses, and Veter-

ans are at an increased risk, as the stressors of service may push many to use tobacco. Getting people to stop smoking, even for the day, helps set the stage for permanently quitting tobacco in the future. For those Veterans ready to take the step, the VA is ready to help assist.

“When you’re looking to quit, the first thing we help you to do is set a date,” says Ms. Rover. “That gives you a goal to reach. In addition, we offer nicotine replacements like patches or medications and counseling to make sure

you’re staying on track.”

Tobacco cessation programs are all free to Veterans and VA employees as long as they meet certain criteria. It doesn’t matter if this is the first time someone is trying to quit, or if they’ve had a few setbacks on the road to a tobacco-free lifestyle. VA tobacco prevention programs offer evidence-based practices to help Veterans kick the habit once and for all.

“The reality is that most smokers want to quit,” says Dr. Jesse McNeil, a staff psychologist at the DVAHCS. “We’ve seen some very encouraging results over the past decade, with trends getting more encouraging over time. If you’re motivated to quit, there is no better time than the present.”

If you or a loved one would like to know more about VA smoking cessation programs, please visit: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/how-to-quit.asp>.

VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

MEDICAL CENTERS

Asheville VAMC

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

Durham VAMC

508 Fulton Street
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov

Fayetteville VAMC

2300 Ramsey Street
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106
www.fayettevilleenc.va.gov

Hampton VAMC

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

Richmond VAMC

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

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

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Albemarle CBOC

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

Brunswick County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3
Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6141

Charlotte CBOC

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

Charlotte HCC

3506 W. Tyvola Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-329-1300

Charlottesville CBOC

590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Chesapeake CBOC

1987 S. Military Highway
Chesapeake, Va 23320
757-722-9961

Clayton CBOC

11618 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West,
Suites 100 & 200
Clayton, NC 27520

Danville CBOC

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

Emporia CBOC

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

Fayetteville HCC

7300 So. Raeford Rd
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106

Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-908-2222

Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredericksburg CBOC

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

Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC

2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27909
919-731-4809

Greenville HCC

401 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-830-2149

Hamlet CBOC

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

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

2580 Henderson Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Kernersville HCC

1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
Kernersville, NC 27284
336-515-5000

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

Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-755-2620

Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-272-3220

Rutherford County CBOC

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145
Forest City, NC 28043-2459
828-288-2780

Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway
Road Sanford, NC 27332
919-775-6160

Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-8860

Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961

Wilmington HCC

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

Wytheville CBOC

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

DIALYSIS CENTERS

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

VET CENTERS

Charlotte Vet Center

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

Fayetteville Vet Center

2301 Robeson Street
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center

3515 W Market Street, Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27403
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

Raleigh Vet Center

8851 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
(919) 361-6419

Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Virginia Beach Vet Center

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

VISN 6 Newsletter

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