

# VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



## VISN-6 DIRECTOR JOINS CGVAMC LEADERSHIP TO OPEN NEW MENTAL HEALTH UNIT



### Inside This Issue

By Vance Janes | CHARLES GEORGE VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- 2 Richmond VA Now Center of Excellence for Lung Cancer Screenings
- 4 Salisbury VA Health Care System Opens New Gynecology Clinic
- 6 Richmond VA Staff Reach 100% Implementation of CPR Training To Effectively Save Lives
- 7 Virtual Women MilVets Summit Oct. 15
- 8 9/11 Memorial to Reopen in Time for Commemoration
- 9 Salisbury VA's Community Living Center Rates as 5-star Facility
- 10 Fayetteville VA Staff Come Through With Visit for COVID-positive Veteran

Deanne Seekins, VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network (VISN 6) director, joined Charles George leadership, medical practitioners and Facilities Management personnel in cutting a ribbon, symbolically opening the new inpatient psychiatry unit at the Charles George VA Medical Center Aug. 11, 2020.

According to Dr. Laura Tugman, CGVAMC Assistant Chief of Mental Health Services, the gesture not only marks the approaching end of a lengthy planning and construction process, but also the beginning of a new era in inpatient psychiatric care at the medical center.

“We’ve really been pushing forward,” Tugman said. “We’ve really worked hard to create a recovery-focused environment. That included calming colors, lighting, acoustic wall panels and even a fireplace.”

Tugman said that Dave Przestrzelski, CGVAMC Chief Nurse Executive, had a lot to do with the successful transition of the unit from a more medical environment to one that’s attractive and comfortable.

**TOP PHOTO:** Deanne Seekins, VISN 6 director, speaks with Chief Nurse Executive Dave Przestrzelski following the ribbon cutting that symbolically opened the new inpatient psychiatry unit at the Charles George VAMC Aug. 11. Przestrzelski was instrumental in implementing the open concept, designed to add comfort as well as safety to the unit. **(Photo by Vance Janes)**

STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



## MESSAGE FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR

### Greetings,

We count on cooler temperatures and fair skies to return September traditions like back-to-school events and football tailgates. But September will look a lot different for us this year, as we continue to meet COVID-19 pandemic challenges and prepare for the upcoming flu season.

Times like this can increase our isolation; things can be more difficult. A lot of us may be feeling kind of down, wondering if the pandemic will ever end, and if life will ever go back to normal. And that worry and stress might hit some harder than others. That's why this year's Suicide Prevention Month needs even more focus than it has in years past. I can't emphasize this enough — we need to check in on each other. Our Veterans and staff have more responsibilities and more stressors. Managing this stress and incorporating healthy coping skills is essential.

I hope you've heard about the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and

End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). It was introduced this summer by President Trump, and it is a call to action to put even more focus on Veteran suicide and our nation's response. In VA, the Be There campaign continues as a significant program, encouraging a focus on increasing awareness and understanding suicide prevention.

We encourage everyone to take action, to start the conversation, and to share the resources and support. Start by visiting [www.BeThereForVeterans.com](http://www.BeThereForVeterans.com) to learn more about preventing suicide and to access available resources.

Now recognized as our national day of service and remembrance, September 11, 2001, was the day that three hijacked airplanes hit their designated U.S. targets, and another crashed before reaching its destination, killing its occupants. The attacks changed our world culturally, socially and politically. It ignited a wave of patriotism that continues now, 19 years later.

Its effect on VA operations has been huge. Determined to improve our security,

our nation also rededicated itself to care for its Veterans. It became clear in programs like the three-year review called CARES Commission (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Service). The report was presented in 2003, resulting in construction and operational changes that instantly increased the VA health care workload from 2.9 million Veterans in 1998 to about 4.8 million patients in 2003, and well beyond 9 million today. In VISN 6, the total number of Veteran health care facilities increased from 10, serving fewer than 150,000 Veterans, to about 45 today, providing care to just over 500,000. The fact that in less than 20 years we have tripled the number of Veterans we reach to provide world-class health care in no way patronizes the vicious terrorists who killed 3,000 Americans and others that terrible day. It reflects our resolve to do what's right for our nation and to care for those who care for us.

**– DeAnne M. Seekins**  
VISA 6 Network Director

## Richmond VA Now Center of Excellence for Lung Cancer Screenings

By Megan Kon

Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS), based in the Richmond VAMC is currently the only VA in the country to be designated as a Screening Center of Excellence by the [GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer](#) for its ongoing commitment to effective lung cancer screening (LCS). Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in both men and women among the general population.

The health care system uses low-dose computed tomography (LDCT), which screens for cancer in its early stages and helps to save Veteran lives.

“The population of Veterans in which we serve is at a very high risk of developing

lung cancer,” says Dr. Peter Lee, the Director of Interventional Pulmonology at CVHCS. “Lung cancer screening is the most effective tool in reducing cancer-related deaths among this population.”

CVHCS currently performs lung cancer screenings for approximately 12% of its eligible high-risk Veteran population. Lee says that is three times higher than the nation.

“Nearly 40% of our enrolled screening population are black Veterans, and of those, 69% are active smokers,” said Lee. “Many live in rural and inner-city settings where unrecognized social determinants of health may adversely impact access to preventive care.”



Richmond VAMC's Central Virginia VA Health Care System is the only VA on the nation to earn the distinction of Screening Center of Excellence by the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer.

### THE DIFFERENCE

Up until the past decade, there was no way to identify lung cancer at an early stage. But now, LDCT screening for lung cancer carried out safely, efficiently and equitably can save tens of thousands of lives a year

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



VISN 6 Director Deanne Seekins speaks to those assembled for the opening ceremony of the new inpatient psychiatry unit at the Charles George VAMC Aug. 11. (Photo by Vance Janes)



(L to R): Chief Nurse Executive Dave Przechlowski, Western North Carolina VA Health Care System Director Stephanie Young, Deanne Seekins, VISN 6 director, and Trish (Patricia) Randall, 5 South Nurse Manager, cut a ribbon symbolically opening the new inpatient psychiatry unit at the Charles George VAMC Aug. 11. (Photo by Vance Janes)

## VISN-6 Director Joins CGVAMC Leadership to Open New Mental Health Unit

“Mr. Przechlowski had helped design units at other facilities, so he brought that knowledge and experience to our design,” Tugman said.

That knowledge and experience helped create a unit that would focus on the people who would occupy it.

“This unit marks the culmination of renovating all of our inpatient units,” Przechlowski said. “When we sat with the architects and quickly dismissed their original concept design and started tearing out walls to make an open living room environment, and floated the idea of an outdoor patio with a view of the mountains on the 5th floor between two towers of an existing building, they thought I was crazy.

“Human-centered design is exactly that,” he added. “What we ended up with is one of the most beautiful healing environments I have ever seen for a mental health inpatient unit.”

Tugman said that in addition to the unit’s

design, there are other unique things that come into play with the new inpatient unit.

“One of those challenges is accounting for the safety of the Veterans while still making it comfortable,” she said. “It would be easy just to make it safe, but to make it safe and to still have a healing component isn’t easy.”

Tugman said a lot of time was spent finding items and products that provided the safety needed without sacrificing the warmth. She compared the new unit to “a big living room” in the center with individual and double occupancy rooms around the perimeter.

One of the biggest standouts of the new unit is the outdoor balcony which allows Veterans to be able to get closer with nature.

“It allows the Veterans to practice coping skills and recovery skills,” Tugman said. “It’s hard to experience the power of being outside and getting fresh air if you can’t go outside.”

The current unit, which is still in use and is adjacent to the new unit, will provide needed space for future options.

“We’re looking at putting in an exercise room with treadmills and things like that,” Tugman said. “That also provides an area where Veterans can use physical activity to learn coping skills.

The new unit still has final inspections from Facilities Management and Patient Safety and is projected to open early this fall.

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

by finding lung cancer early, when it is most treatable and curable.

The CVHCS LCS Program opened in 2017. In the program’s first two years, the team enrolled 1,182 Veterans, and continues to add approximately 600 Veterans annually. Between 2017 and 2019, LDCT diagnosed 16 new lung cancers. Of these cancers, 62% were stage I or stage II. When diagnosed early, Veterans can achieve 5-year survival rates of up to 92%.

To give perspective, two-thirds of the nation’s lung cancer diagnoses are discovered at advanced stages. Without early detection, the chances of survival within five years of diagnosis can be as low as 16%.

### OUR TEAM

The LCS team at CVHCS consists of two nurse navigators, Kelly Szerenyi, a nurse practitioner and Robin Willingham a registered nurse, and two pulmonologists, Dr. Peter Lee and Dr. Howard Li. The comprehensive screening program provides education on early lung cancer detection, tobacco cessation counseling, abnormal lung nodule management and maintenance of an LCS registry. The program is an integral part of the CVHCS multidisciplinary Thoracic Tumor Board, which provides high-quality diagnosis and management of thoracic malignancies to Veterans.

### MAINTAINING THE SCOD DESIGNATION

To maintain this Center of Excellence status, the team plans to raise lung cancer awareness among high-risk Veterans and to continue to advocate for lung cancer screening across all sites of care. As they improve their methods of screening to address healthcare disparities among high-risk Veterans, they will incorporate new technologies and evidence-based strategies. The future success of the program will rely on an effective LCS registry. The registry will assist in exploring new screening outcomes of high-risk, under-served Veterans, and help to develop opportunities for precision oncology.



# Salisbury VA Health Care System Opens New Gynecology Clinic

By Amanda Reilly | SALISBURY VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been tough to balance celebration-worthy achievements with social distancing and following other guidance regarding gatherings. On July 20, 2020, the Salisbury VA Health Care System managed to accomplish this as it unveiled a brand-new gynecology clinic. The small-scale ribbon-cutting event was attended by only approximately 10 people, yet included all the components of a larger appreciation ceremony, ensuring that the dedicated staff included in this project were able to enjoy the recognition and appreciation that is well deserved.

With the need for Women's Health Services continuously on the rise, the gynecology clinic relocation will provide a more functional space and updated environment for women Veterans to receive their care. The renovation project began in April 2020 and took approximately two months to complete. Some of the services involved with the renovation project included Engineering, Logistics, Women's Health, and Interior Design.

The ribbon cutting ceremony began with a brief introduction and remarks from guest speakers, including Executive Director Joseph Vaughn, Acting Chief of Staff Dr. Randall Geh-

**PHOTO ABOVE:** On July 20, 2020, a small-scale ribbon cutting ceremony was held to celebrate the completion of a new gynecology clinic at the Salisbury VA Medical Center. From left to right: Dr. Randall Gehle, Medical Director, Charlotte HCC; Mr. Joseph Vaughn, Executive Director, Salisbury VA Health Care System; Dr. Helen Malone, Chief, Gynecologist. (Photo by Luke Thompson, Medical Media Photographer)

le, and Chief Gynecologist Dr. Helen Malone. "We are very excited to have this dedicated space for our Veteran women, to provide them the very best care available," expressed Vaughn during his speech. The brief ceremony ended with a tour of the brand-new unit.



## VA Partners With OnStar to Bring Suicide Prevention Services to Veterans With the Push of a Button

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that it is partnering with OnStar's emergency services to improve access to suicide prevention resources for Veterans.

This partnership will offer Veterans in crisis the opportunity to be transferred to around-the-clock, confidential support via VA's [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (VCL) when they use the emergency services button in an OnStar-equipped vehicle or OnStar Guardian smartphone app.

"The VA-OnStar partnership aims to promote suicide prevention and reduce deaths by suicide by providing additional resources to Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie.

"This partnership will help Veterans access suicide prevention support services and assistance directly and immediately. More than 400 VA suicide prevention coordinators and their teams, located at every VA medical center, connect Veterans with care and educate the community about suicide prevention programs and resources daily."

An average of 20 Veterans die by suicide each day. Through this partnership, VA and OnStar, a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors, will collaborate to provide education and training to VA clinicians and OnStar call center staff to facilitate suicide prevention efforts for Veterans. Additionally, VA will provide resources and education to OnStar about

military culture and how to determine if a caller is a Veteran.

"OnStar services are designed to help our customers go out into the world feeling safer, and we recognize that for many people — and in particular Veterans — a crisis can start from within," said Catherine Bishop, senior global emergency services manager for OnStar. "This partnership with VA allows our emergency-certified advisors to better serve the heroes who have served us."

Suicide prevention is a top priority and VA has made great strides in Veteran suicide prevention, especially in crisis intervention. Partnerships such as this are coordinated by the Veterans Health Administration's [Office of Community Engagement](#).

# Hampton VA Long-Term Care Receives 5 Stars

By Hampton | VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

On Aug 19, 2020, Hampton VA Center announced that its Community Living Center received 5 stars in Quality and 5 stars Overall on 2nd Quarter FY2020 CLC Compare.

CLC Compare is a mechanism to benchmark VA Community Living Centers (CLCs) against private-sector nursing homes using a star-rating system that mimics the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Five Star Nursing Home (NH) Compare methodology.

There are three domains (Survey, Staffing, & Quality Measures). Each domain has its own 5-star ratings that are used to determine an Overall 5-Star rating. Hampton received 3 stars-Survey, 5 stars-Staffing and 5 stars-Quality.

Chief Nurse Community Living Ms. Vernadine Hampton stated, “It is a tremendous accomplishment to come from where we started: 2-Star overall rating, 2 Stars-Staffing and 1 Star in Quality to 5 Stars-Overall, 5 Stars-Staffing and 5 Stars in Quality. Even more so during this critical time of COVID-19, where we have had to quarantine our residents, stop family visitation and keep the residents COVID-19 free.”

In addition, the Hampton VA CLC has had a very successful short-term rehabilitation program. Many veterans have come to the CLC after surgery for physical therapy or for wound care, or extended IV therapy. These

## THIS SUCCESS COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT:

- Dedicated staff providing excellent care utilizing evidence-based practices
- Continuous education and training of staff
- Participation in the VA Concert Learning Intensive Quality Improvement training
- Teamwork, continuous analysis and monitoring of our quality measures, and implementing evidence-based practices to improve care to our residents
- Effective restorative nursing program and a dedicated team
- The continued efforts of CLC’s front-line nursing staff, providers, pharmacists, psychologists, recreation therapist, PT, OT and CLC Leadership who work hard every day to provide world-class care to our residents

veterans have been successfully discharged back to the community within 90 days. Their success has contributed to the increase in stars on the quality measures.

The star rating proves that we are moving in the right direction.

Hampton is not the only facility in VISN 6 that has been recognized for its outstanding care. The data shows that VISN 6 has six of seven CLCs with 5 stars in quality and 4 CLCs that are 5 stars overall. VA’s nursing home system — composed of more than 130 community living centers — compares closely with



SCI photo: (L) Terence Hardy and Alma Trigg (Nurse Managers, SCI) celebrate with SCI staff

private-sector nursing homes, even though the department on average cares for sicker patients in its nursing homes than do private facilities.

“I firmly believe that we have been successful by focusing solely on the specialized care of our CLC population,” Crystal Lindaman, Associate Director Patient Care Services, said. “We have dedicated staff who share a close personal bond with their Veterans and families, and care for them as they would their own family member. Our staff members are constantly looking for new and innovative ways to better the care of our Veterans. A shining example is Ms. Saretha Cannon. She was awarded the VA Secretary’s Award for Nursing Excellence in the Nursing Assistant category for her idea on the use of a weighted vest to assist Veterans with dementia. Ms. Cannon, along with all our staff members, continues to work diligently to care for our Veterans under historical circumstances day in and day out. We continue to strive for excellence. We stand guard to provide essential nursing care to our Veterans each day and I couldn’t be prouder.”

*Thank you, Team Hampton!*



CLC photo: (R) Vernadine Hampton (Chief Nurse, CLC) celebrates with CLC staff in recognition of receiving 5 stars

# Richmond VA staff Reach 100% Implementation of CPR TRAINING TO EFFECTIVELY SAVE LIVES

By Megan Kon | RICHMOND VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

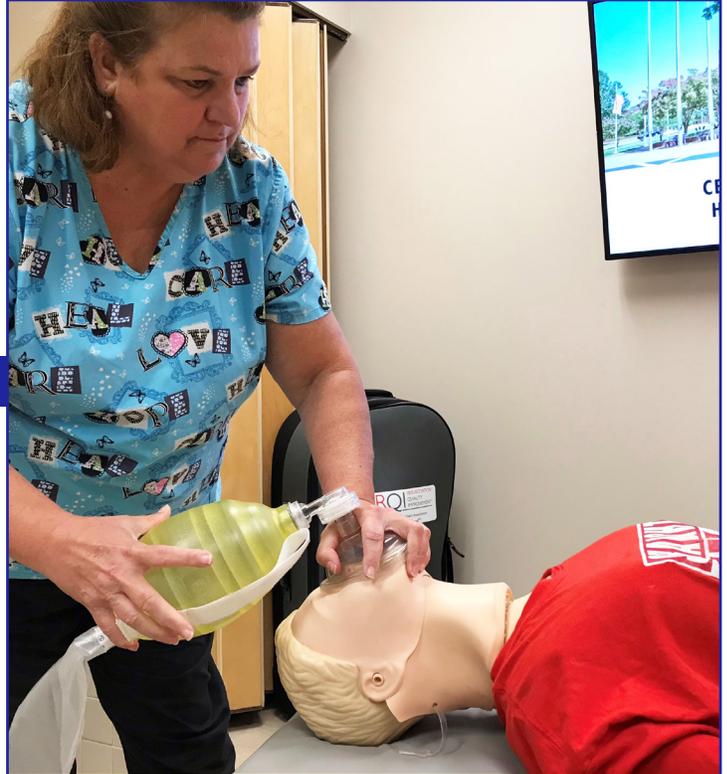
According to RQI Partners LLC, more than 200,000 in-hospital cardiac arrests occur annually in the United States, with survival rates at less than 26%. Clinical educators at Richmond’s Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) know the value of keeping health care provider’s skills as up to date as possible. A program from the American Heart Association called Resuscitation Quality Improvement (RQI) Program provides hospitals and clinics with RQI training stations where clinicians can train without having to leave their clinical areas.

CVHCS was the first health care system in VISN 6, to implement the RQI program, having distributed 26 RQI stations throughout the health care system. Today, CVHCS has 2,410 clinicians training on the RQI stations out of a total 11,812 clinicians training across the VISN.

“We have significantly increased our use of RQI,” said Brenda French, the acting deputy associate chief of staff and education at CVHCS. “As a teaching facility, it helps to make learning a seamless transition from the academic to the clinical environment.”

VISN 6 became the first VA network in the country to migrate to the RQI program in 2016. Last year, RQI enhanced its program to [RQI 2020](#).

“With the new RQI system, we have seen better results with CPR quality in simulation sessions,” said Jonathan Nguyen, simulation operations specialist in the education simulation center at CVHCS. “In the past,



Brenda French, the acting deputy associate chief of staff and education at CVHCS illustrates the functionality of an RQI station.

some providers were only demonstrating these perishable skills every other year, and that’s not often enough. The RQI training has increased the frequency at which clinicians are trained and the duration of time it takes to train them to maintain proper skill retention.”

Mary Rasmussen, vice president of business development at RQI Partners says that VISN 6 has trailblazed RQI implementation efforts, showing their dedication to improving patient care.

## Charles George VA Employee Takes on ‘World’s Toughest Race: Eco Challenge Fiji’

By Allison Amrhein | CHARLES GEORGE VA HCS

Dr. Anne Bailey from the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville, N.C., is one of the Team Unbroken competitors on this season’s Amazon series *World’s Toughest Race: Eco Challenge Fiji*.

Hosted by survival instructor and TV host Bear Grylls, an ex-Special Air Services serviceman instructor, the show, which airs Friday nights, follows 66 teams who, over 11 days, must complete a 417-mile obstacle course of rivers, ocean and swamp. The race has five legs, and teams must pass 31 checkpoints to locate five medallions.

Team Unbroken consists of five people, all with unique backgrounds and unique injuries or disabilities: two combat Veterans with innumerable war injuries, including deafness, PTSD and traumatic brain injuries; one Type 1 diabetic; one with a severe back injury; and one with a seizure disorder.

They are: Team Captain Hal Riley, U.S. Army Veteran and Purple Heart recipient Keith Knoop, retired Army Command Sergeant Ma-

yor and Bronze Star recipient Gretchen Evans, VA Pharmacist Bailey, and Team Assistant Cale Yarborough.

Bailey is a Clinical Pharmacy Specialist and Innovation Specialist, who said she is an educator at heart. She has taught a wide variety of topics, ranging from Human-centered Design to Fitness and Wellness, and from Hepatitis C to HIV, and much more. As an Innovation Specialist, Bailey coaches and mentors frontline staff, networks both within and beyond VHA,



(L to R): Hal Riley, TV host Bear Grylls, Gretchen Evans, Keith Knoop and Anne Lord Bailey.

and participates in the implementation and diffusion of impactful innovations and best practices.

In early January 2019, someone introduced [Gretchen Evans](#) to the race. She not only put a team together and recruited Bailey, but also said, “I’ll pull together a group of people that no one would ever pick to do this.”

*World’s Toughest Race: Eco-Challenge Fiji* was filmed over almost two weeks across hundreds of miles of rugged terrain, complete with mountains, jungles, rivers and oceans throughout Fiji. The course was open for 11 days of non-stop, 24-hour-a-day racing, including teams from 30 different countries. All filming took place in September 2019 and wrapped prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The heartbeat of Team Unbroken is to show ourselves and others with wounds — whether visible or invisible — that anyone with fierce determination and the right support system can face the toughest obstacles,” Bailey said. “The Team also exemplifies the value of Veterans and civilians working together for the common good.”

# Virtual Women MilVets Summit Oct. 15

North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has held a Women MilVets Summit annually for several years, so the social restrictions currently in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 really dejected organizers in the spring when they realized the event could be compromised. But they worked quickly to come up with an alternative, and the group was successful. The event will still happen this year, albeit virtually.

Of course, this event will not offer all of the bells and whistles that have enriched past conferences, like vendors or breakout micro-sessions. But the one-day agenda slated for Oct. 15, 2020, from 9:00am-12:00pm promises a full, meaningful presentation of experts and stakeholders who will offer the latest developments in military women's issues, transitioning and perpetual.

Dr. Mandy Cohen and Dr. Michelle Laws from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services will be joined by North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, Shenekia Williams-Johnson and others for the abbreviated event. Much of the agenda will focus on pandemic-related challenges, but as always, the goal is to encourage female Veterans to stay connected and informed, to empower and enable them to thrive no matter what.

Registration opens Sept. 1 at [www.milvets.nc.gov/events/2020/](http://www.milvets.nc.gov/events/2020/)

## Recent Events at Salem VAMC



From left - Dr. Teresa Conner, Associate Provost of Health Sciences, and Dr. Sara Nicely, Chair of the Radford University Carilion PA Program, present a plaque to Ms. Rebecca Stackhouse, Executive Director of the Salem VA Health Care System Aug. 21. The Radford University delegation presented the first Student Advocacy Award which was accepted by Stackhouse on behalf of the entire Salem VA HCS team. In presenting the award Nicely said, "The students come away from these rotations with an increase in not only medical knowledge but also an increase in confidence necessary to be competent and efficient providers. Our program appreciates that our students are able to participate in the medical management of heroes who have served our country." (Photos by Rosaire Bushey)



VISN 6 Network Director DeAnne Seekins gets a tour of the Salem VA Medical Center's new Renal Dialysis facility currently under construction during a visit Aug. 21. With Seekins is Eric Carpenter, Chief Engineer. The \$10.64 million facility, which began construction in March 2019, is expected to be completed in November, adding 3,018 square feet of renovated space and an 8,431 square feet of new space. Background left to right, Allen Moye, Salem VAMC Associate Director, Dr. Thomas Martin, acting Chief of Staff, and Rebecca Stackhouse, Salem VA Health Care System Executive Director. (Photos by Rosaire Bushey)



# 9/11 Memorial to Reopen in Time for Commemoration

This is the 19th anniversary of the terror attacks on the United States. Special observances and tributes are planned all across the country. September 11th has been designated as Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance through proclamations by Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump. At the site of the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center bombing, the 9/11 Memorial is concerned with honoring those who were killed.

The memorial was closed in March this year, in response to the guidance provided by New York state and local governments regarding large public gatherings and in an effort to limit opportunities for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Officials said in a

statement that "As part of the fabric of the city, we recognize our responsibility to operate in the best interest of the millions who live, work and visit here."

But the memorial will now reopen. "The 9/11 Memorial Museum will reopen exclusively for 9/11 family members on the 19th anniversary of 9/11. It will reopen to the public, five days a week, starting on September 12."

As in years past, the focus of the commemoration will be the reading of the names. Out of an abundance of caution and in line with the guidance regarding social distancing, we will not ask family members to read the names of victims in person on a stage this year. Recorded readings of the names made by 9/11 family

**(ABOVE PHOTO)** The 9/11 Memorial Museum will reopen exclusively for 9/11 family members Sept. 11, 2020, reopening to the public the following day.

members will instead be used for the 19th anniversary commemoration ceremony.

In the days following the ceremony, The Memorial's hours of operation will be adjusted upon Museum reopening to mirror the Museum as much as possible, and will remain open seven days a week, from 12:00-7:00pm on Thursday and Friday, and from 10:00am-5:00pm on Saturday through Wednesday. Still, all visitors must follow established health and safety guidelines, and masks must be worn onsite at all times.

## New Richmond VA Police Show Value with Drug Bust

By VISN 6 Public Affairs Office

Two individuals will report later this fall to U.S. Federal Court in Richmond on drug charges stemming from a bust made recently by some of Richmond VA Police Service's newest members, including their newly assigned canine, Bella.

At approximately 11:30am Aug. 20, Officer Charles Battle, a new hire for the Richmond VA Police Service, was informed by a medical center Valet staff member of an illegally parked vehicle. Battle, retired from the Richmond Police Department, began with the VA outfit this past April.

On approach, Officer Battle was unable to rouse the vehicle's occupants with knocks on the window, as they were unresponsive. He then radioed for assistance. Not knowing if this was a medical emergency, Battle opened the door and shook the driver, who finally woke up, with his passenger. Both occupants seemed unstable and appeared to be under the influence.

Once Sergeants Andres Perez, Jeffrey Almond, and Officers Andrew Gibbs and Priscilla

Wright arrived at the scene, the occupants declined their request to search the vehicle. The response prompted the group to call their K-9 Officers. Corporal Anthony Demery and Canine Officer Bella have been on duty with Richmond VA's Police Service since June of this year.

Canine Officer Bella (pictured here) alerted on the vehicle for illegal drugs, as soon as they arrived on scene. As Bella walked around the vehicle, she sat at the area her nose detected illegal substances, as she'd been trained. That alert gave the officers probable cause to request a search warrant of the vehicle. At that point, the driver consented to the search.

During the search, officers discovered a white powdery substance (which the driver identified as heroin), and a green, leafy substance, suspected to be marijuana, along with a large knife. The suspects were then charged with drug possession and introducing illegal substances onto federal property, the items were seized, and their vehicle was impounded.

Once the paperwork was complete, the suspects, who'd been on the premises as transportation for a Veteran with an appointment, were released with an assigned court date.

Based on that result, this counts as Bella's first bust! Great job to all the Richmond VA Police Service members and Canine Officer Bella for a job well done.



Corporal Anthony Demery and Canine Officer Bella recently worked together to make Officer Bella's first drug bust.



# Salisbury VA's Community Living Center Rates as 5-star Facility

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Community Living Center (CLC) at the W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center continues to provide care for our Veterans at an outstanding level, maintaining a 5-star rating for the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2020.

"Maintaining a 5-star rating requires a lot of work and attention to detail," said Dr. Mark Heuser, associate chief of staff for Geriatrics and Extended Care. "The starting point is understanding that by providing the best care and documenting that care accurately will translate into excellent measures of that care, which is reflected in the 5-star rating system used for all long-term care facilities in the U.S., not just VA."

The rating considers the facility's RN staffing levels, quality measures, and the survey. Long Term Care Institute conducts the survey, which, according to Lauren Crotts, chief nurse for Geriatrics and Extended Care, is the hardest metric.

"They interview patients, family, staff, review policies, and perform chart reviews," said Crotts. "It's a complicated process. They look at the whole environment of care, how much like home it is, how institutionalized it is — does your staff know the Veterans? The survey is so difficult because you never know what you're going to get. It's very complex. It's all about the type of surveyors and what they are looking for."

A couple of years ago, VA adopted the same measurements as the civilian sector so that it could compare its facilities with those in the

community. Salisbury VA saw its previous VA rating drop to one star with the institution of the new system. It wasn't that the care had changed — the metrics had.

"When the new measurement was started, we didn't have the opportunity to fully understand the complete tool and the few changes made to it by the VA," said Heuser.

The fact is, VA could play it safe and only accept low-risk admissions — a no-fall risk, or someone in relatively good health — to make getting a high rating easier. But VA doesn't do that.

"We don't shy away from difficult admissions because of how it may impact our quality measure," said Crotts. "We look at it as a challenge. We take care of very complex wounds.

Right now, we are ranked better than many of the facilities we compare to in our community."

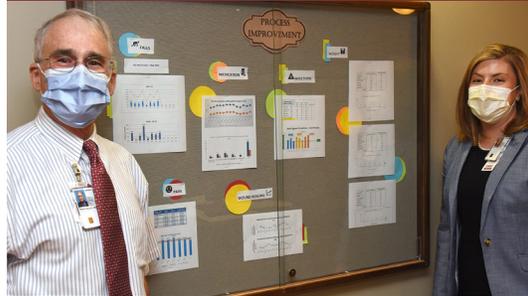
Since the beginning of the pandemic, only one resident of the 124-bed CLC has tested positive for COVID-19, even though multiple employees have.

"That probably is a result of good technique that the staff are using every day, not only their handwashing but in their use of personal protective equipment," said Heuser. "It's a real compliment to the staff."

Even though the CLC boasts a 5-star rating, the CLC leadership and staff are looking for ways



Lauren Crotts, chief nurse for Geriatrics and Extended Care, and Dr. Mark Heuser, associate chief of staff for Geriatrics and Extended Care, stand by the sign of the recently awarded 5-star Community Living Center. (Photo by Luke Thompson, Medical Media Photographer)



Dr. Mark Heuser, associate chief of staff for Geriatrics and Extended Care, and Lauren Crotts, chief nurse for Geriatrics and Extended Care, take a pause from looking at data at the recently awarded 5-star Community Living Center. (Photo by Luke Thompson, Medical Media Photographer)

"Even though we are 5 stars in quality, we are implementing a new program to review quality data from a different angle," said Crotts. "It's important to continually update our practices and look at new ways of dissecting the data. Just because we are sitting at 5 stars doesn't mean we aren't going to shoot for better."



## September is Suicide Prevention Month.

**be there.**

**This Suicide Prevention Month — and every month — Be There for Veterans and let them know that your organization cares. Simple gestures of support can provide hope during challenging times.**

As a leading Suicide Prevention Month advocate, VA will amplify the message to Veterans and their networks that support is available, suicide is preventable, and resources exist to help Veterans get back on track.

Download Suicide Prevention Month materials and learn more about VA's **Be There** campaign at

[BeThereForVeterans.com](https://www.bethereforveterans.com)

Here are ways your organization can join Suicide Prevention Month efforts:

- Host a **S.A.V.E. Training** for your community and ask your local Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) to help coordinate.
- Share our social media messages and graphics on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Add a web banner to your facility website or office webpage.
- Connect with your local SPC** and ask about training opportunities.
- Add the **Veterans Crisis Line** (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1) to your signature block in case a Veteran you know is having thoughts of suicide.

# Get Out the Tissues! Fayetteville VA Staff Come Through With Visit for COVID-positive Veteran

The Fayetteville VA Coastal Health Care System inpatient units have been closed to visitors since March, when VA leaders initiated restrictions throughout the facility to help mitigate the spread and effect of COVID-19. At that time, the facility created a special unit for individuals who were suffering from the effects of COVID-19. Those Veterans have not been able to visit or socialize with family or friends in the last six months. But the facility has implemented a variety of creative programs to help Veteran patients cope with their isolation.

According to Fayetteville staff member Kim Turner, “We treat our Veterans with the utmost care. Our Veteran Earl Whitfield has been in our COVID unit for almost two months.” Even though he was able to speak to

his wife on the phone several times a day, they have not seen each other’s faces.

“Our wonderful nurses here at the Fayetteville VA took the initiative to be able to make a reunion happen,” Turner said. “They planned an outing for the patient to not only feel the warmth of the sun on his face, but also to gaze into his loving wife’s eyes.”

When asked how they felt about their reunion after so long, Whitfield’s wife stated with a chuckle, “It’s so wonderful — I wasn’t sure I still had a husband.” Whitfield stated, with a twinkle in his eyes, “It’s great to see my wife, and we haven’t even argued.”

As reported earlier, Fayetteville VA staff has also used iPads for virtual face-time visits, doing what they can to ease the burden of social isolation.

Veteran Earl Whitfield and his wife enjoyed a face-to-face visit for the first time in many months thanks to the efforts of Fayetteville VA nursing staff.



**Preventing  
the Flu  
Begins with  
YOU!**



# VA Rolls Out Simplified Travel Reimbursement System for Veterans, Beneficiaries

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced in June that it is rolling out a new system for Veterans and eligible beneficiaries to submit and track transportation reimbursement claims using VA's secure web-based portal, [Access VA](#), which is accessible 24/7, 365 days a year.

The Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS) will simplify how [eligible Veterans](#) and beneficiaries claim mileage reimbursement for travel to and from VA health care, or VA-authorized non-VA health care.

"VA is committed to finding new ways to innovate and simplify how we serve Veterans and their beneficiaries," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Streamlining the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System will help our Veterans get their travel reimbursements more securely and efficiently."

BTSSS enables Veterans and Caregivers to submit claims for reimbursement of costs from a personally owned vehicle, common carrier, pre-approved meals and/or lodging, and other travel-related expenses such as tolls, parking, and luggage.

The national implementation across [Veterans Integrated Service Networks](#) (VISN) will occur in phases until November 2020. The first phase will start in July, and includes VA Salt Lake City Health Care System, Kansas City VAMC, Bay Pines VA Health Care System, Houston, TX, and Minneapolis VA Health Care Systems. The implementation will continue in phases beginning on the following dates:

**Sept. 8, 2020:** VISNs 1, 9, 12, 17, 21, 22

**Oct. 5, 2020:** VISNs 2, 6, 10, 15, 20

**Nov. 2, 2020:** 4, 5, 7, 8, 16, 19, 23

As BTSSS goes live, the use of kiosks will be discontinued, however in person claims and hard-copy submissions are still available. For more information on BTSSS and eligibility, visit the [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement](#) webpage.

## #IWearAMaskFor



Wearing a mask is one of the most important things you can do to keep the people around you safe. Tell us who you wear a mask for by posting a photo of yourself in a mask and tagging us on [Facebook](#)/[Twitter](#)/[Instagram](#) @[insert\\_localVAMC\\_handle](#) using the hashtag #IWearAMaskFor.

@deptvetaffairs   
 @VeteransHealth   
 @VeteransHealth   
 VA   
 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

# 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 | 888-878-6880  
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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Questions or comments about the newsletter, email [stephen.wilkins2@va.gov](mailto:stephen.wilkins2@va.gov) or call 919-956-5541

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