

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

August 2018



A monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve them. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to barry.venable@va.gov.

Annie Here: How Are You?



It's lunchtime in St. Cloud, and U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Bill Ranczka is sitting in his car in the parking lot at work. He's had a rough morning, so he's focusing on breathing deeply and listening to his favorite music. Annie suggested it.

Across town, later that evening, U.S. Army Veteran Juli Joseph is looking in her closet. She's selecting outfits for the next three days and enjoying quiet time after an intense day at her job as a sexual assault victims advocate. Annie suggested this, too.

It's not a coincidence that both Ranczka and Joseph heard from Annie. It's part of the VA care they receive at the St. Cloud VA Health Care System.

Meet Annie

Annie is [VA's automated texting system](#) that reminds Veterans to do self-care activities between appointments. VA intends to begin releasing Annie nationally this fall. St. Cloud is one of 17 VA locations where the system is being tested first.

VA care teams can use Annie to text Veterans many types of reminders to manage conditions. For example, a Veteran might get the message "Hi, it's Annie with a helpful reminder. Did you remember to take your blood pressure medication? Please reply 'MED yes' or 'MED no.'"

Ranczka and Joseph both receive Annie messages that help them manage anxiety. Their VA psychologist, Dr. Jennifer Roth, Psy.D., LP, signed them up for the program this past January – and technically, she did a lot more than that. Dr. Roth is the VA clinician who helped to design Annie's mental health self-care messages.

First, Veterans pick the days and times they want Annie to check on them. The initial message always asks, "Are you feeling anxious? Text Y or N." If the answer is no,

Annie will text back with a message to keep having a great day. If the answer is yes, Annie asks them to choose whether they want to do a breathing, mindfulness or other activity.

“Annie gives them an active coping skill in that moment to decrease their anxiety,” Dr. Roth explains.

The connection matters most

Ranczka says Annie offers an at-home connection to his VA care that he didn't have before. “I get the text, and it's like Annie is asking me if I'm okay. I know it's not an actual person, but it feels like there's somebody checking on me. I know it leads back to someone, somewhere. No matter how bad I'm doing, at least this program is thinking about me.”

Joseph's experience is similar.

“I don't have a lot of people who message me, so when the text comes in, it makes me feel like someone's there to care for me. Annie came into my life when I really needed it. She kind of feels like a sister. I can count on her to be there every day.”

Joseph adds that the activities Annie suggests have made a big difference in how she manages anxiety. “Instead of going home and watching TV, I look forward to doing what Annie suggests. It helps me because I'm not sitting there on the couch stewing in negative emotions. I'm engaged in a positive activity.”

Annie's other messages

In addition to anxiety, Dr. Roth has helped to design three other mental health “protocols” for Annie: anger management,

grief and activity engagement for elevating mood. Each protocol incorporates proven coping strategies and educational information to help Veterans engage in self-care between appointments with their VA care team.

To date, Dr. Roth has helped to train 35 mental health staff members throughout the St. Cloud health system, and more than 100 Veterans are now enrolled in one or more of Annie's mental health protocols. Another 100 St. Cloud patients are also enrolled in primary and specialty care Annie protocols, like weight management, hypertension, medication reminders, surgical care and many others.

Everyone's abuzz about Annie

Dr. Roth says word about Annie has spread fast. “I've had Veterans approach me and ask, ‘What do you know about Annie?’ And I'll respond, ‘Well, actually ...’

“It's been a great experience to be a part of this opportunity to help our Veteran population. Annie is very versatile. It's been rewarding to see the many ways it has encouraged Veterans to become more active participants in their own self-care.”

Learn More

You can learn more about the [Annie App for Veterans](#) and [Annie App for Clinicians](#) on the [VA App Store](#). Even though Annie is available as an app, Veterans don't need a smartphone to use it. The system works on any basic cell phone with text messaging capability, which will make it more widely available to Veterans everywhere.

St. Cloud VA Summer Games



The 4th Annual St. Cloud VA Summer Games will be held Saturday, August 4, at Building 96 at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center.

The public is invited to watch Veterans as they compete in a 1-mile walk/run/cycle, pool/billiards, badminton, rowing, weightlifting, table tennis, horseshoes and two new events, ski erg and pickleball.

Schedule of Events:

8 to 9:45 a.m.	Participants check in at B96
9 a.m.	1-mile run starts
10 a.m.	Opening Ceremony
10:30 a.m.	Game events start
Noon	Lunch for participants
1:30 p.m.	Awards Ceremony

Missing Money Website

Life gets in the way and people lose track of possessions due to moving or personal issues.

Visit www.missingmoney.com to locate missing funds from insurance proceeds, bank accounts, refunds, settlements, and more.

The site includes instructions for reclaiming the funds and includes people who have passed away.

Low MSA Vacancy Rate at St. Cloud VA

Medical Support Assistants, also referred to as clerks, are an indispensable part of the health care team. They are the glue that binds our care teams together, and are the first voice or face patients encounter when seeking care throughout the health care system.

A steady and reliable customer experience depends on an efficient scheduling process, prompt, easy check-in, and having someone answer patient phone calls, and the MSA community handles these tasks several thousand times per day.

To improve our service to Veterans, recruiting and hiring MSAs has been a focal point for the health care system for the past couple of years, and these efforts have paid off in terms of prompt and efficient service to Veterans.

As of the middle of July, there are over 3,000 MSA vacancies across VHA. At the same point in time, St. Cloud VA had just 5 vacancies out of a total of 176 full-time employee equivalent positions. That's a vacancy rate of under 3%, and is the lowest in the VA Midwest Health Care Network and 5th lowest across VHA.

Having caring people in these key positions means better service to Veterans. Please continue spreading the word about our Career Fairs (the next one is October 13) because these have played a major role in keeping MSA positions filled.

More Cancer Treatment Options for Veterans



The National Cancer Institute and VA Interagency Group to Accelerate Trials Enrollment (NAVIGATE) is launching at Minneapolis VA Health Care System and 11 other VA sites. (Image courtesy National Cancer Institute)

Veterans at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System with cancer will now have more access to the latest treatment options, thanks to a partnership between VA and the [National Cancer Institute](#) (NCI).

The NCI and VA Interagency Group to Accelerate Trials Enrollment, or NAVIGATE, is launching at Minneapolis VA Health Care System and 11 other VA sites: Atlanta; the Bronx, New York; Charleston, South Carolina; Denver; Durham, North Carolina; Hines, Illinois; Long Beach, California; Palo Alto, California; Portland, Oregon; San Antonio; West Haven, Connecticut; and Boston. Boston will also serve as a coordinating center for the effort.

NAVIGATE will build infrastructure at these VA sites to enable more Veterans to take part in cutting-edge clinical trials sponsored by NCI. Such trials typically test cutting-edge experimental treatments such as precision-medicine therapies based on patients' genetic profiles, or immunotherapies that harness patients'

own immune systems to bring about cures.

The NAVIGATE network will also establish best practices and share insights to help other VAs nationwide enroll more Veterans in cancer clinical trials. Special attention is being given to minority patients, who often have poorer access to new treatments and are not as well-represented in clinical trials in the U.S.

"We are proud to serve as one of the host sites of this important research effort," said Darwin Goodspeed, Acting Director of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

While VA has a robust [research program](#)—including clinical trials on cancer and other diseases—at more than 100 sites nationwide, VA facilities often face challenges initiating and completing trials, including ones conducted through the [NCI National Clinical Trials Network](#). Local VA research staff, for example, may lack adequate support to handle certain regulatory and administrative tasks involved in these studies. NAVIGATE will help remove those barriers.

NAVIGATE will also seek to enroll Veterans in trials sponsored by [NCI's Community Oncology Research Program](#) that focus on cancer prevention and symptom management.

VA's involvement in NAVIGATE is being managed through the Cooperative Studies Program, part of VA's Office of Research and Development. CSP has a long history of running impactful clinical trials focused on Veterans' health needs. To learn more about CSP and VA Research overall, visit www.research.va.gov.

August Vietnam Veteran Recognition Ceremonies

The St. Cloud VA is a commemorative partner in the national [Vietnam War Commemoration](#), and is committed to publicly thanking and honoring Vietnam Veterans and their families.

According to Stephen Black, Director for the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, many Vietnam Veterans have never been told “thank-you.”

“We want to change that,” he said.

“Vietnam-era Veterans and families desiring to participate in the commemoration event can simply show up and check in,” Black said.

The following two commemoration events are scheduled for August.

Chippewa County Recognition Ceremony & Town Hall

A ceremony honoring Vietnam era Veterans living in Chippewa County and surrounding areas followed by a town hall meeting focused on improving VA health care services and programs is scheduled on Aug 21, at 5 p.m., at the Montevideo VA Clinic, 1025 North 13th Street, in Montevideo, MN.

The Vietnam Veteran recognition ceremony is the first item on the agenda and the town hall meeting will take place immediately afterwards.

Beginning at 4 p.m., Chippewa County Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss enrollment in VA health

care and provide information on the full range of Veterans benefit programs.

Kanabec County Recognition Ceremony

A Vietnam Veteran recognition ceremony in Kanabec County takes places on August 4 at 2:30 p.m. at the Mora Civic Center, 701 S. Union Street, in Mora, MN.

County Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of health care services and benefits beginning at 10 a.m.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Mental Health Recovery Outreach Group

Wednesday, Aug. 1 5-6 p.m.

Good Earth Co-Op

2010 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN

Hosted by the St. Cloud VA, Veterans and family members are welcome to attend. VA enrollment or pre-registration is not required to attend the meeting. Call 320-252-1670, Ext. 6503, or email leigh.vandewalker@va.gov for more information.

Meeker County Fair

Thursday, Aug. 2 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

1230 N. Armstrong Ave., Litchfield, MN

A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Introduction to Whole Health

Friday, Aug. 3 or Monday, Aug. 20
Noon-2 p.m. 10 a.m.-Noon
St. Cloud VA St. Cloud VA
Bldg. 28, Rm. 67 Bldg. 4, Rm. 114

A class that equips Veterans to take charge of their health by emphasizing self-empowerment, self-healing, and self-care. No pre-registration is required.

MACV Standdown

Friday, Aug. 3 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Mora Civic Center & Fairgrounds

701 S. Union Street, Mora, MN
A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Summer Games

Saturday, Aug. 4 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
St. Cloud VA Medical Center
4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN
Events include 1-mile walk/run/cycle, pool/billiards, badminton, rowing, weightlifting, table tennis, horseshoes and introducing two new events, ski erg and pickleball. Public is invited to attend. Call 320-252-1670, Ext. 6180, for questions.

Vietnam Veteran Recognition Ceremony

Saturday, Aug. 4 2:30 p.m.
Mora Civic Center & Fairgrounds
701 S. Union Street, Mora, MN
Vietnam Veterans and families desiring to participate can simply show up and check in. A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will also be available to discuss the full range of benefits from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, Aug. 6 8:10-8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103

Veterans Law Clinic (by appointment only)

Tuesday, Aug. 7 & 21 Noon-2 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 28, Room 34
Free legal consultation for Veterans. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment.

Kandiyohi County Fair

Wednesday, Aug. 8 10:30 a.m.-7 p.m.
907 7th St. NW, Willmar, MN
A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Coffee Talk

Friday, Aug. 10 2-3:30 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 4, Rm. 114
Learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care. If you can't come in person, dial-in via telephone at: 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#. All Veterans are welcome.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, Aug. 15 8:10-8:30 a.m.
WJON AM 1240

McLeod County Fair

Thursday, Aug. 16 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
840 Century Ave SW, Hutchinson, MN
A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Douglas County Fair

Friday, Aug. 17 10 a.m.-7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Aug. 18 10 a.m.-7:30 p.m.
300 Fairgrounds Road, Alexandria, MN

A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Expo for Seniors

Saturday, Aug. 18 8 a.m.-Noon
10 Fourth Ave. South, St. Cloud, MN
A Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to discuss the full range of benefits.

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) Resource Fair

Saturday, Aug. 18 9 a.m.-Noon
Sturges Park, 401 Lake Blvd. S., Buffalo, MN
Representatives from the St. Cloud VA suicide prevention program will be available to answer questions.

Vietnam Veteran Recognition Ceremony & Town Hall

Tuesday, Aug. 21 5-6 p.m.
Montevideo VA Clinic
1025 N. 13th Street, Montevideo, MN
Vietnam Veterans and families desiring to participate can simply show up and check in. A town hall meeting, focused on VA health care services and programs, follows. County Veterans Service Officer and VA staff will be available to talk about the full range of benefits beginning at 4 p.m.

Military Appreciation Day – State Fair

Tuesday, Aug. 28 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
1265 Snelling Ave. North, St. Paul, MN
A resource fair, including VA staff, will be available in Dan Patch Park from 8 a.m.- 4 p.m. Parade begins at 2 p.m.

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to <https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp>

Interesting Facts:

Night owls are more likely to be single.

If Earth's entire history were compressed into a single year, modern humans would first appear on December 31 at about 11 p.m.

Shooting stars are not stars – they are meteors.

Today's Quote:

The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.

--Pablo Picasso

Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number	320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User	320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria	320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic	218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic	320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline	877- 424-3838

Billing:

- VA Care 866-347-2352
- Non-VA Medical Care Ext. 6483
- Veterans Choice Program 866-606-8198
- Debt Collection Issues for Choice 877-881-7618

Chaplain Service	Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals	Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints	Ext. 6304
Eligibility	Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic	Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program	Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate	Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line	855-560-1724
Privacy Officer	Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office	Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)	Ext. 6336
Transportation	Ext. 7622
TRICARE	844-866-9378
Voluntary Service	Ext. 6365
VA Police	Ext. 6355

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