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On the cover:

This photo of items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is one of several similar images often displayed with a VBA traveling timeline exhibit on veterans benefits. Items like these are on display in museums at VA facilities all over the country, where they help personalize the sacrifices made by veterans.

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Editorial Assistant: Matt Bristol

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810 Vermont Ave., N.W.

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(202) 273-5746

E-mail: vanguard@mail.va.gov

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INTRODUCING

John P. Lewis

Burned-out. It's a phrase some use to describe those who are unable to cope with the difficulty of growing close to, and then losing, terminally ill patients. John P. Lewis, a chaplain with the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System who often comforts dying patients, uses a technique he calls "visual journaling" to help digest the pain of loss.

Visual journaling combines sketches, pictures or newspaper articles—any image that reflects feelings or reactions—with written responses. "I grow close to my patients over the course of their illness and I need some way to process my feelings of grief," said Lewis. "This is a coping mechanism we can use to help process grief. I find that if we don't do that then we become mechanical about what we're doing, so we won't get too close to people."

In March, he led a workshop on visual journaling at a five-day training seminar hosted by the Association of Professional Chaplains, a national organization providing education, standards of care and certification for professional chaplains. Lewis is state chair of the association's Arkansas chapter. He developed the technique while working with troubled teens in a state-run juvenile detention center, where he served as chaplain prior to joining VA in 1993. "Most of the kids didn't want to talk with you, because they saw you as an authority figure," he recalled. "I found that if I started drawing, then they'd begin to open up a bit."

When he began working at VA,

the Army veteran adapted his creative sketching to meet a more personal need—coping with the loss of patients. "One patient lived on the Little Red River and he loved to compare himself to a tough old Cypress tree that grew on a shoal near his house," he said. "So, I drew that Cypress tree in my journal to help me remember the value of that particular person and my feelings at the time."

Another journal entry simply reads, "Your quiet and caring manner preaches a very loud sermon." The words were spoken by a patient's wife shortly after her husband's death. "That passage helps me remember that it is okay to be a quiet guy," said Lewis. "The message will get through if I am genuine and care."

His colleagues call him unassuming and say his low-key manner comforts patients and their families as they confront life-threatening illnesses. "He's a very

mild-mannered person," noted James A. Ryan, Jr., supervisory chaplain in the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, "and his approach has been very effective when he's providing palliative care."

In addition to his work at the medical center, Lewis is also a pastor in a rural community church and an accomplished artist with a penchant for outdoor settings. His active images of fly fishermen, hunting dogs, birds and other wildlife scenes have appeared in exhibitions throughout the state. "Art is a creative and enriching part of life that enables me to be a better chaplain," Lewis said. ❑

By Matt Bristol



Catherine Rick,
Chief Consultant,
Nursing Strategic
Healthcare Group



It's my honor and privilege to lead our nation's largest nursing workforce in VA's challenging and dynamic health care delivery

system. When I arrived in Washington last June to begin my new role as chief consultant for the Nursing Strategic Healthcare Group, I was committed to focus on our strengths of caring and competence.

I came to headquarters after more than eight years working at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, where I experienced the honor of serving our nation's veterans and gained a sincere respect for the value of VHA as a health care resource for veterans and the broad-reaching contributions we make toward advancing clinical practice.

I believe that if we want to advance nursing practice, we must develop strong collegial relationships with our clinical partners. Positive nurse-physician partnerships are pivotal to achieving quality patient care. And building systems to support this working relationship are essential. The VA Nursing Strategic Plan was recently developed with this in mind. The goals outlined in the plan include:

■ **Leadership development** – operationalize the High Performance Development Model for all levels of nursing;

■ **Technology/systems development** – develop and/or enhance systems and technology to support the role of nursing in health care delivery models;

■ **Health care delivery systems development** – collaborate in the development of interdisciplinary health care delivery models across the continuum of care in the context of a changing health care environment;

VA Nursing: A Tradition of Caring and Competence

■ **Nursing workforce** – recruit and retain a qualified nursing workforce;

■ **Collaboration with external forces** – develop partnerships between nursing and external organizations (i.e., professional nursing and health care leadership organizations, veterans service organizations, academic affiliates); and

■ **Nursing practice indicators for quality and performance** – identify/develop key indicators to support evidence-based nursing practice that enhance cost-effective care.

Over the past few months, I've devoted about half of my time to facility visits. I've had the pleasure of visiting more than forty facilities to date. It is clear to me that our veterans are served by a dedicated, caring and competent nursing staff. As we approach National Nurses Week

(May 6-12), I offer my recognition and gratitude for the contributions of VA nurses. These positive attributes are particularly noteworthy in light of the multiple stressors facing our health care workers today.

The challenges of implementing numerous cutting-edge clinical initiatives, including Pain Management, End-of-Life Care, Bar-Code Medication Administration, Computerized Patient Record System, Minimum Data Set, Millennium Act and Root Cause Analysis, raises the bar for our caring and competence. I'm impressed by the hard work that makes all of these initiatives come to life.

When I ask nursing staff what makes work fun, the most common answer I get is, "Making a difference, helping our veterans." That's the beauty of what nurses do—have fun making a difference! □

President Proposes \$51 Billion Budget for FY 2002

President Bush has proposed a \$51 billion budget for VA in fiscal year 2002, \$4 billion more than the current spending limit. Continuing improvements in health care and a new push to speed up benefits claims processing are major features of the proposal.

The budget request proposes about \$28 billion for entitlement programs, including disability compensation, education, home loans and vocational rehabilitation. It also includes more than \$23 billion for health care, the cemetery system and other programs. The proposed budget recognizes that some military retirees who receive health care from VA will switch to a new Pentagon-funded program that allows them to receive free care from their private doctors, plus a generous prescription drug benefit. □

Web Streams 'VA Report' to Computer Desktops

VA has taken another high-tech quantum leap by using video streaming technology to put its employee news video "VA Report" on the Department's Internet Web site. Thousands of VA employees, veterans and interested parties can watch the 23-minute, 45-second program on their computer desktop by going to www.va.gov/opa/feature/index.htm, or from the VA home page, clicking on "Public Affairs" and then "Feature Items & Information."

It's not the first time VA has used the technology, but it is the longest video stream posted on the Internet by VA. VA's Office of Public Affairs (OPA) used video streaming to put brief messages by former Acting Secretary Hershel Gober on the VA home page. It also posted a brief greeting from new Secretary Anthony Principi when he took office in January. OPA plans to post all future editions of "VA Report," as well as other video of Department-wide interest, on the Web site. □

VA Gets 'Clean' Audit for Second Straight Year

VA is one of 18 federal agencies that received an unqualified, or "clean," audit opinion this year, and one of only 14 to receive it two years in a row. Twenty-four agencies are required to submit the annual audits.

"This year's clean audit opinion clearly demonstrates that our financial organizations are committed to being effective stewards of this Department's resources," said VA Acting Assistant Secretary for Financial Management D. Mark Catlett. "It sends a strong message to Congress and American taxpayers that VA can accurately account for its \$48 billion in expenditures in FY 2000."

Independent auditor Deloitte & Touche LLP, under the direction of VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG), performed this year's audit. Prior years' audits have been conducted by the OIG. Working with an independent auditor presented challenges, in that Deloitte & Touche auditors were not as familiar with

VA's programs and financial accounts as the OIG. Catlett said these challenges were met and VA's success in audit improvements was due to the efforts of VA staff—including the OIG, the three administrations, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Management—working in concert with Deloitte & Touche.

The OIG agreed with the opinions and the conclusions in the auditor's report, which indicated that VA's financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, VA's financial position, and that the Department's overall fiscal operations and reporting are sound.

The OIG complimented VA management for its commitment to addressing previously reported material internal control weaknesses, and making significant improvements in several financial management areas. Because of identified improvements in cash reconciliations with Treasury, the material weakness

cited for this area in last year's audit report was closed.

The auditor's report also cited VA's progress in improving information technology security controls and Housing Credit Assistance (HCA) program accounting. Progress made in HCA program accounting included the conversion of this activity to VA's core financial management system.

The audit did address two internal control weaknesses that will be the focus for continued improvements during the coming year: information technology security controls and lack of an integrated financial management system. The Department is committed to pursuing existing planned remedial actions and system initiatives in these areas.

For the first time, VA's statements were submitted to the Office of Management and Budget by the March 1st deadline established by the Government Management Reform Act of 1994. □

New Center for Veteran Entrepreneurs Opens

Veterans who own or want to start their own businesses now have a one-stop resource for information about loans, business management programs, online training and procurement opportunities with federal, state and local agencies. VA's new Center for Veterans Enterprise, a sub-division of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, opened in February at VA headquarters.

The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 gave VA specific responsibilities to help veteran entrepreneurs. VA designed the center to act as a clearinghouse for information about federal, state and community small business programs, and to serve as a focal point for carrying out the law's requirements.

VA partnered with the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC) to develop the one-stop concept for technical and management assistance. The ASBDC has a network of nearly 1,000 community-based

centers to serve veterans and small business owners.

VA, the SBA and the Department of Labor are working together to help service-disabled veterans who want to open or expand businesses. VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) have partnered to help companies in the DoD marketplace. And veterans also receive support from Corporate Advocates for Veterans and Government Advocates for Veterans, two groups formed by the center staff.

The law established goals for federal agencies and large businesses with federal contracts to promote contract opportunities for veterans and service-disabled veterans. Federal agencies should spend 3 percent of their prime contract dollars with firms owned by service-disabled veterans. For VA, that amounts to about \$150 million a year.

"It makes sense that VA should help veterans start businesses," said Scott Denniston, director of VA's Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization. "Three new

businesses are thought to be created as a result of each business that opens in a community. Veterans helped preserve the freedom we enjoy—they should have the opportunity to enjoy the American dream of owning a business."

Ninety-eight percent of the nation's 22 million businesses are small businesses with fewer than five employees. The center estimates that veterans own 5 million businesses. To be considered veteran-owned, a business must be at least 51 percent owned and controlled by one or more veterans. One of the center's responsibilities is to identify these businesses and annually inform the veteran owners of federal procurement assistance available to them.

When veterans call the center, the staff asks where they live, where their business is located, and whether they have an established or an emerging business. Emerging entrepreneurs can be referred back to their home community to receive help the same day. Veterans with established businesses are referred to corporate and government advocates

and federal agency small business specialists.

Program oversight groups report to the White House and Congress with recommendations on how agencies can improve support to veterans in business. These groups include the National Veterans Business Development Corporation, and the SBA's Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Development, Office of Advocacy, and Office of Government Contracting.

VA Secretary Anthony Principi, Rep. Lane Evans (D-Ill.), Rep. Jack Quinn (R-N.Y.) and Bill Elmore, the SBA's associate administrator of veterans' business development,

participated in the center's dedication ceremony. Other speakers represented veterans advocacy organizations that were instrumental in helping to get legislation passed establishing a federal veterans entrepreneurship program.

"After the dedication, the phones started ringing and they haven't stopped," said Gail Wegner, deputy director of the center. "We've been so busy trying to stay ahead, we haven't had time to take a breath."

The VA Center for Veterans Enterprise will focus on identifying veteran-owned businesses, offering technical assistance and informing business owners about procurement

opportunities. The SBA concentrates on helping veterans with financial assistance and business development. Veterans interested in grants or loans can also contact the veterans affairs officer at the local SBA district office or through the SBA's Web site, www.sba.gov/VETS/rep.html.

The center's Web site, www.vetbiz.gov, includes information on pertinent laws, federal acquisition regulations and other resources for veteran entrepreneurs. For more information on the Center for Veterans Enterprise, call (202) 565-8336 or toll-free at (866) 584-2344. □

By Fran Heimrich

VA Launches Toll-Free Agent Orange Helpline

VA has a new national toll-free telephone information and referral service to help Vietnam veterans with questions and concerns about Agent Orange exposure and VA benefits. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) expanded the helpline operation at the St. Louis VA Regional Office that has served Gulf War veterans since 1995.

The new service for Vietnam veterans comes on the heels of the Department's decision to add adult-onset (Type II) diabetes to the list of presumptive diseases associated with herbicide (Agent Orange)

exposure. A regulation to provide monthly disability compensation to Vietnam veterans with adult-onset diabetes is expected later this year. VA estimates that around 200,000 Vietnam veterans will receive service-connection for diabetes within the first five years under the new policy.

By dialing (800) 749-8387, callers can either speak directly to VA representatives Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Central Standard Time, or access a 24-hour automated system. They can leave voice mail messages to have informa-

tion sent to them or listen to recordings about health care and benefits available to Vietnam veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange.

The new Agent Orange helpline is part of a stepped-up outreach effort by VA to in-country Vietnam veterans as they age and as scientific studies continue to expand knowledge of the possible long-term health effects of exposure to the defoliant. VA now recognizes 10 medical conditions as being associated with Agent Orange, which was used

(continued on page 11)

On the Road...

New VA Secretary Anthony Principi has begun venturing out of headquarters to visit VA field facilities. At the Baltimore VA Medical Center (right), Cheryl Minnehan, a registered nurse, showed him how the Bar-Code Medication Administration system works. In Philadelphia (far right), the Secretary announced during a news conference that the



Philadelphia VA Medical Center is the site of one of six Parkinson's Disease Centers VA is establishing. Looking on is Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.



NCA Appoints Five New Field Office Directors

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has appointed directors of the five new Memorial Service Networks (MSNs) replacing its previous three area offices. The new field structure, announced last fall, is designed to increase oversight of VA's national cemeteries through



Muro

a reduced span of management control. The locations of the three previous area offices—Philadelphia, Atlanta and Denver—remain the same, while two MSNs are being added at Indianapolis and Oakland, Calif. All will be collocated with VBA offices.

The increasing workload and



Row

Fred Watson, NCA's director of Field Programs Service.

The new MSN directors include three longtime NCA managers: ■ in Atlanta, Robert Wilk, previous area manager there for more than six years, who has worked in NCA for 14 years; ■ in Oakland, Steve Muro, most recently acting director of the Western (Denver) Area Office and

NCA's objective to implement high-level appearance standards nationwide required closer supervision in the field and realignment among cemeteries reporting to the supervising offices, said

the Golden Gate, Calif., National Cemetery, who has been with NCA for 22 years; and ■ in Philadelphia, Ronald Pemberton, director of the Florida National Cemetery for the past six years, and NCA employee for more than 20 years. New to VA are:

■ in Denver, Cheryl Row, who held several positions at the Department of Energy (DOE)'s Denver field office over the past nine years, including facility manager for DOE operations and chief of the Emergency Preparedness Branch; and ■ in Indianapolis, George M. Webb, most recently director for plans and program analysis with the American Forces Information Service at the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C. Webb was with *Stars and Stripes* newspapers from 1995 to 2000, and had a 23-year career in the Navy. □



Wilk



Pemberton



Webb

Brown Portrait Unveiled



Former Secretary Jesse Brown waves to VA Central Office employees who gathered to watch his portrait unveiling from the glass elevator lobby overlooking the conference room where the ceremony was held. With Brown are artist Tom Nielsen (left) and Secretary Anthony Principi.

Former Secretary Jesse Brown was honored last month at VA headquarters, where his official portrait was unveiled. VA Secretary Anthony Principi, former Mississippi Congressman G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery, and members of Congress offered remarks and personal reflections on Brown and his tenure as VA Secretary.

Guests at the March 14 ceremony included former VA Deputy Secretary Hershel Gober, veterans service organization representatives, and VA staff. "I'm going to take advantage of this opportunity to thank all of the VA employees who stood with me throughout my years as Secretary," Brown said after helping unveil the portrait. "I will never forget that you were at my side, cheering me on."

The portrait artist, Tom Nielsen, is a retired VA Central Office employee who now has a studio in Augusta, Ga. Brown's portrait will hang alongside those of his predecessors outside the Omar Bradley conference room in the Secretary's office suite on the 10th floor. Brown served as VA Secretary from 1993 to 1997.

VA Puget Sound HCS Shakes as Earth Quakes

Many of us in Los Angeles had already noticed that Southern California, a desert in disguise, and the Pacific Northwest, a rainforest in disguise, have exchanged weather. With L.A. drenched by more than three times the rain in Seattle this year, it was as if a giant hand had turned the West Coast upside down.

A couple of weeks ago, we had a corresponding reversal of geology. "Seismology Central," another name for Los Angeles, has not had one of its famous temblors in a long time. But on February 28, at 10:55 a.m. (PST), the Puget Sound area, whose largest city is Seattle, was hit by an earthquake reported preliminarily by the University of Washington as magnitude 6.8.

The epicenter was 11 miles north of Olympia, on the Cascadia fault, 30

miles deep. The Northwest Earthquake, as it was instantly named, was felt as far south as Portland, Ore., and as far inland as Salt Lake City, Utah.

Washington state capital Olympia suffered significant damage. Throughout the Northwest, 270 earthquake-related injuries were reported, most of them minor. Amazingly, the earthquake caused not even one death, with the possible exception of a heart attack fatality some media accounts attributed to the quake.

VA fared quite well. The morning after the earthquake, VISN 20 (Portland, Ore.) Director Ted Galey, M.D., Clinical Manager Les Burger, M.D., and Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group Liaison Bruce Binder toured the Seattle and American Lake (Tacoma) Divisions

of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System (HCS). The inspection team found no injuries to VA employees, patients or others at either location, with both divisions having successfully completed all actions required by their emergency preparedness plans.

The Seattle Division sustained only minor problems, such as a temporarily stalled elevator. All division clinics resumed activity on the same day as the earthquake. Even in the immediate quake aftermath, it was not necessary to evacuate patients from any clinical care or nursing unit. This good news was due in large part to the fact that the nursing tower, the main patient care building, is of relatively new construction and was built to seismic standards.

The 75-year-old American Lake Division, in Tacoma, sustained more damage than did the Seattle facility. Patients were temporarily moved to areas outside of buildings, as a precautionary measure, until VA engineers could complete surveys and deem the structures safe. Surgeries were temporarily cancelled. Areas of one building remained closed for a few days until a more detailed seismic inspection could be completed, requiring, as a safety precaution, relocation of staff but not of patients. All American Lake Division clinics almost immediately resumed normal activity.

In a letter to VA Puget Sound HCS staff published in the employee newsletter, Galey praised their handling of the situation. "I cannot begin to enumerate all the episodes of quick thinking and very sound responses that were carried out in these busy facilities that were full of patients when the earthquake was occurring in the middle of the workday," Galey wrote.

"I want to especially recognize the employees of all the disciplines whose first thoughts were for the veteran patients. In the face of real personal peril, they stayed with the patients making sure they were protected, cared for and calmed." □

By Joe Barison
Los Angeles OPA Regional Office

Oldest Known Veteran Dies

The nation's oldest known veteran was laid to rest in Tennessee on March 4. Nearly six months earlier, VA employees from all over the country had helped John Painter celebrate his 112th birthday. After hearing about the milestone from an e-mail message, they sent him more than 500 birthday cards.



Painter

Painter died of an apparent heart attack at his home in the Hermitage Springs community. His funeral drew hundreds to the town of Red Boiling Springs. Roland Moore, director of the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, represented the White House, and shared comments and a letter from VA Secretary Anthony Principi. Wendell Gilbert, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs,

delivered a letter from Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist.

After the ceremony at the funeral home, a long caravan traveled to the Hermitage Springs cemetery where Painter was buried. For the last mile of the trip, his casket was transferred onto a horse-drawn carriage led by a riderless horse, a fitting tribute to a veteran who drove horse-drawn ammunition wagons to the front lines during World War I.

Oncoming cars stopped for the procession, and some parked along the roadside to witness the historic moment and pay their last respects. At the hillside gravesite, members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans dressed in re-enactment uniforms fired three volleys from Civil War-era muskets to mark the passing of the nation's oldest known hero.

Painter's remarkable life included working as a blacksmith and raising two daughters with his wife Gillie, his childhood sweetheart. In 1999, he received the French Legion of Honor medal for his World War I service. □

Museums Chronicle Veterans' Sa



Merriman Barnes, who works in the Exhibits Section of VACO Media Services, constructs cabinets for the VA New Jersey Health Care System's museum.

“ If you build it, they will come,” James Earl Jones said confidently in a classic line from the 1989 film, “Field of Dreams.”

Though he was referring to a baseball diamond, the same can be said for museums. In fact, the actual field used to film the movie has become a museum of sorts—a hot spot for baseball fanatics visiting Dyersville, Iowa.

And now, communities across the nation are getting a close-up look at veterans' sacrifices and the evolution of VA benefits thanks to the growing number of veterans museums appearing in VA medical centers, regional offices and national cemeteries.

A strong supporter of veterans museums during his 1989-1992 tenure as VA Deputy Secretary, Secretary Anthony Principi recognizes the significance of VA museums. “Not only are museums ideal for preserving our nation's history, but they're also an effective way of reaching out to the community and sharing our history of caring for veterans,” he said.

Perhaps one of the best-known VA museums is located in what was

once a crowded waiting room at the New York VA Regional Office. It opened in 1998, featuring a timeline of veterans' memorabilia, artifacts, photographs and other items chronicling military history and the delivery of veterans benefits. As part of an outreach plan, the museum is now hosting elementary school students eager for a lesson in American history.

According to Joseph Collorafi, a program analyst who frequently serves as museum tour guide, many of the children initially believe a “veteran” is someone who takes care of animals. “The younger generations are really not aware of the contributions veterans have made to our country,” he said. But the regional office is hoping to change that. “Over the summer we had a HACU [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities] intern who really dedicated her efforts to raising our visibility,” said Collorafi. “She worked on developing a brochure, compiling a mailing list, writing letters. Now her efforts are coming to fruition.”

Across the river at the East Orange campus of the VA New Jersey Health Care System, development of a veterans museum highlighting wartime medical advances is underway. “One of our goals is to create an environment where the heritage of our nation's veterans will be preserved and where the public has an opportunity to learn about the history of veterans and military medicine,” said Mary Therese

Hankinson, public affairs specialist and chair of the museum committee.

Central to the museum is an eight-sided carousel composed of individual segments, each featuring a significant medical discovery. One segment depicts the development of X-ray technology during the Spanish-American War; another replicates the lab of Dr. Oscar Auerbach, who in the 1950s established a direct link between cigarette smoke and cancer and served as chief of laboratories at the East Orange VA Medical Center. Around the Memorial Day weekend, the museum will unveil a new segment depicting military life in the Vietnam era and how helicopters increased the odds of survival for the battlefield-wounded.

A unique museum at the Salisbury, N.C., National Cemetery focuses on Civil War POWs and the



Stephanie McGuiness, former HACU intern, and Joe Collorafi, a program analyst, take local schoolchildren on a tour of the veterans museum at the New York VA Regional Office.



Displays highlighting wartime medical advances are featured at the VA New Jersey Health Care System's veterans museum.

crifices, Evolution of VA Benefits



A display of antique hospital furniture at the Hot Springs, S.D., VA Medical Center's museum.

Confederate-run POW camp from which the cemetery traces its origins. Inside the museum, a wooden model of the camp's original layout is supplemented by black and white photographs, uniforms, flags and other items showing visitors "what life was like back then," said cemetery director Ralph E. Bennett. He

said the museum typically attracts both Civil War buffs and those researching family history. "A lot of people heard about the cemetery and want to see it for themselves. Some say as many as 11,700 Union soldiers died here and were buried in mass graves."

Interested in setting up a display or museum? The VA Central Office (VACO) Media Services Office can provide some tips. Visual information specialist William Hester, Jr., who's helping coordinate development of the New Jersey Veterans Museum, has assisted a number of facilities with content planning and design for both displays and museums.

Funding for museums varies, he said, but no VA appropriated funds are used. "Money for cabinet work, track lighting and other design elements is typically donated by veterans service organizations, private individuals and corporations. And display items are also donated or on loan from veterans, employees or other museums."

Even VACO is getting in on the



A museum at the Salisbury, N.C., National Cemetery features a wooden model of the Civil War POW camp that once occupied the grounds.

act. Tabletop displays and poster exhibits marking the observance of Black History Month went up in the lobby in February, and March welcomed displays for Women's History Month and VA outreach. David Bell, chief of VACO Media Services, said the displays will vary each month to reflect national observances and VA achievements. For more information on setting up displays or museums, contact Bell via e-mail or at (202) 273-9781. □

By Matt Bristol

A Growing Trend

Here are some VA locations with veterans museums...

Hot Springs, S.D., VA Medical Center
Atlanta VA Regional Office
New York VA Regional Office
Houston VA Regional Office
Jackson, Miss., VA Regional Office
Northern Arizona VA Health Care System
VA New Jersey Health Care System
Montgomery, Ala., VA Medical Center
Salem, Va., VA Medical Center
Mountain Home, Tenn., VA Medical Center
Birmingham, Ala., VA Medical Center
San Antonio VA Medical Center, Audie Murphy Museum
West Los Angeles VA Regional Office
Little Rock, Ark., VA Medical Center
Phoenix VA Regional Office
Amarillo, Texas, VA Health Care System

Salisbury, N.C., National Cemetery
VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System
VA White City, Ore., Domiciliary
VA Roseburg, Ore., Health Care System
San Joaquin Valley, Calif., National Cemetery
Sioux Falls, S.D., VA Medical & Regional Office Center
Loma Linda, Calif., VA Medical Center

...and others with permanent displays

Milwaukee, Wis., VA Medical Center, Clement J. Zablocki Office
Saginaw, Mich., VA Medical Center, Aleda E. Lutz display
Waco VA Regional Office, Texas POW/MIA & Medal of Honor display
Tomah, Wis., VA Medical Center, historical archives display

National Cemeteries Practice Earth-Friendliness



The Los Angeles National Cemetery, a 115-acre greenbelt in the middle of a busy commercial center, is becoming a model for resource conservation.

Global warming...power blackouts...declining water tables...deforestation of natural areas and contaminated drinking water. In the year 2001, these are all real issues from around the world.

Ironically, April 22 marks the 31st Earth Day—began in 1970 with the message “New Energy for a New Era.” But before you think all is lost, keep in mind there are many cities, businesses and organizations that have moved forward on environmental issues.

Take the city of Los Angeles. While there are more people and cars than ever clogging the arteries of this busy metropolis, air pollutants and smog have been on a steady decline through a concerted effort of responsible programs.

Or take the Los Angeles National Cemetery. Can a cemetery, you may ask, possibly be conservation-minded/earth-friendly/environmentally sound? A model for Earth Day?

“Absolutely,” says Bill Livingston, Los Angeles National Cemetery director. The cemetery, a 115-acre greenbelt in the middle of one of the busiest commercial centers

of Los Angeles, is becoming a model for resource conservation. Livingston began making some significant changes in 1999 that are not only reaping environmental rewards, but financial benefits as well.

“One of the most important things we did was change to a new high-tech irrigation system that saved over 1 million gallons of water in the first year of its use,” said Livingston. “That one change has saved over \$37,000 of taxpayer dollars so far.”

Livingston also changed equipment. Instead of using the traditional lawn mowers, new “recycle” mowers were brought in. The significance of this equipment is that instead of having piles of grass clippings that need to be collected and discarded, the mowers actually put grass clippings back into the earth to act as fertilizer and replace nutrients in the soil.

Needless to say, there is a significant side benefit of manpower savings. Asked if the employees using this equipment had difficulty adapting to the new process, John Lockhart, a groundskeeper at the cemetery for more than thirty years,

replied, “The equipment took some getting used to, but now I think they’re the best. They give a nice, clean cut and no clippings to speak of.”

Next, the facility installed its very own state-of-the-art weather station. By constantly monitoring the ground and weather conditions, the weather station automatically adjusts water schedules.

“Rather than depending on a human schedule and possibly wasting hundreds of gallons of water, this equipment now lets the actual soil and weather determine when and how much water is needed,” Livingston explained.

Likewise, a new method of fertilization allows the grass to be fed when the grass needs it—not when a calendar dictates it. The process uses a time-release product that lasts for three months—saving manpower, dollars and excessive chemicals.

In the 1980s, national cemeteries began to be designed in concert with environmental protection ideals to maintain wetlands, flood plains, endangered species and historic sites. Many cemeteries now incorporate portions of acreage kept in its natural state.

The 4-year-old Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent, Wash., is one example. Beautiful areas of trees and wetlands were preserved throughout the cemetery to keep its natural look. Deer can still be seen in some parts of the site. The result is a serene and thoughtful place that blends into its environment without destroying or harming the ecological balance.

In Phoenix, the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona is all desert landscape. According to cemetery director Mark Maynard, 10,000 new bushes, shrubs, and foliage are being added to enhance the cemetery’s look.

“All of these plants are indigenous to the desert so we can plant them without adding an unnatural burden to the desert,” said Maynard. Since the planting is native flora, natural wildlife in the area won’t be

disturbed either. "We're living in harmony with the environment here."

Other good examples of earth-friendly sites include the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, where they are using recycled water for irrigation from a state prison nearby. Likewise, Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas, is also using recycled water from the city's water system.

Back in Los Angeles, Bill Livingston says earth-smart changes are helping the cemetery become more ecologically responsible and he's willing to explore any new ideas. Recently, during some severe thunderstorms that moved through the area, Livingston lost one of the oldest trees on the property, an 87-year-old Italian Stone pine.

Rather than have the tree destroyed and discarded, Livingston determined that parts of the historic tree could be recycled. One of his novel ideas: cutting out slices and using them as plaques for employee awards.

As Livingston explained, "Why not give an award that is meaningful in its content as well as its sentiment? After all, these are real pieces of history from the cemetery and will mean more to our employees than a piece of paper mounted on cardboard."

Granted, most people wouldn't think of connecting Earth Day with a VA national cemetery. In fact, most people think of national cemeteries as large parcels of green grass that serve as a final resting place for those who served. They can see that national cemeteries are shining monuments of respect to the nation's veterans. Now they can add Mother Earth to the list.

For more information on the Los Angeles National Cemetery, contact Bill Livingston at (310) 268-4675. For more information on earth-friendly trends at national cemeteries, contact NCA's Office of Construction Management at (202) 565-4890. □

By Susan Fishbein
Los Angeles OPA Regional Office

AO Helpline (cont.)

primarily to expose enemy hiding places during the war.

Another element of the increased outreach effort is the expansion of the mailing list for VA's *Agent Orange Review* newsletter. In partnership with the Veterans Health Administration's Environmental Agents Service, VBA has added 375,000 in-country Vietnam veterans to the distribution.

A special issue of the newsletter, summarizing VA benefits and services available to veterans exposed to Agent Orange and the procedures to obtain these benefits, has been mailed to the more than 300,000 veterans currently on VA's Agent Orange registry. It is also being sent to the veterans added to the mailing list through a VA-DoD computer matching project. And as a complement to the helpline, VBA's Compensation and Pension Service has developed an Agent Orange Web page at www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/benefits/herbicide/. □

New Social Work Chief Revives Long-Vacant Job



Manske

VA's Social Work Service has been a whirlwind of activity since Jill Manske's appointment as service director. Even before she left her post as chief of Social Work in the New Mexico

VA Health Care System, she was preparing to revive the long-vacant top spot.

In August, she met with staff from the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to pitch legislative remedies for a 1991 law that's been causing headaches for VA social workers for nearly a decade. That law required social workers to be licensed in the state in which they practiced. But if they transferred to another facility, in another state, they would have to get a new license. That meant additional paperwork, additional licensing fees, additional headaches.

But thanks to her efforts, and lots of help from Human Resources, General Counsel and other staff offices, the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 permits VA social workers to maintain out-of-state licensing—a practice consistent with licensure laws for physicians and other health care professionals—and also replaces social work's stiff three-year licensing mandate with a more flexible time frame.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to impact social work VA-wide," said Manske, referring to her new role. But having an impact is familiar territory for this nearly 20-year VA veteran.

In the mid-1980s, she developed outreach programs for women Vietnam veterans through the St. Paul, Minn., Vet Center. She later became the first women veterans coordinator at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. And in the early-'90s, she developed programs for women veterans in what were formerly VA's Central and Western Regions.

As director of Social Work

Service, Manske says her primary mission is to provide guidance and consultation on issues affecting the roughly 3,500 social workers operating under VA. It's a vital mission, as nearly half of all VA medical centers function without a chief social worker—meaning many social workers are hired, evaluated and supervised by someone who may not fully understand their discipline.

As a result, Manske is helping medical centers establish Social Work practice boards responsible for conducting peer reviews, assessing social worker competency and tracking continuing education and state licensure requirements. She's also preparing a directive to guide supervisors on the essential social work functions that should continue regardless of the facility's organizational structure.

"Social workers provide care to veterans in virtually all VHA programs," Manske said.

"My job is to assure that they have all the tools they need to provide that care, such as Social Work standards of practice and practice guidelines." □

San Diego Welcomes Groundhog Day ‘Shadows’



High school student Janice Correa questions Cindy Cunningham, a registered nurse at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, about her job duties.

the tuition reimbursement program.”

Other students had less clear career ambitions. Supervisory radiology technologist Joe Gagliardo’s high school shadow showed up for the day sporting spiked blue hair and super-sized Levi’s. Rather than preaching *Dress for Success 101*, Gagliardo took his shadow’s unconventional

appearance in stride. “He looked like a teenager,” he said. “But I think this experience opened his eyes as to the professional expectations of a medical environment.”

Gagliardo admitted that he just might have learned as much from his shadow as the teen did from his experience at the medical center. “He was a great kid, and I’m glad we had the opportunity to interact with him because it allowed us to see several things, like how structured our system is and how we can better cater to younger, new hires,” he said. Andy Mosley hopes to see high school shadows more often. “This is a great outreach mechanism,” said the chief of Respiratory Therapy. He explained that the number of students enrolling in respiratory therapy programs has dropped over the years. “Recruiting is difficult, so making contact with young people is essential.”

To give his shadow a glimpse into the role of a respiratory therapist, Mosley asked the family of a patient in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) if his shadow could watch a therapist at work. The family consented and the student got a first-hand look at how a respiratory therapist operates a ventilator and interacts with other ICU staff to care for critical patients. “Hopefully, she can take that experience and share it with her friends,” said Mosley.

According to Sue Wojcieszek, a career technician with Mt. Carmel High School who helped coordinate the shadowing event, the students were very impressed with the VA staff they met. “We were talking about their experiences on the bus ride back to school and all the students agreed that it was helpful. For them to actually spend time with someone in a career field they’re considering, it benefits them in so many ways.”

Created in 1997 by the joint efforts of America’s Promise, Junior Achievement, School-to-Work, and the American Society of Association Executives, National Groundhog Job Shadow Day introduces young people to the day-to-day activities of a particular career field and demonstrates how their education can be applied in a work setting. Last year, more than 1 million middle and high school students, together with some 75,000 businesses, participated in the event. For more information, check out www.jobshadow.org. □

By Matt Bristol

Savings Bonds Campaign Coming Up

Buying Savings Bonds helps promote thrift and increase personal savings. Bonds offer a safe vehicle for investment, tax advantages and market-based interest rates from the date of purchase. And your annual opportunity to start or increase an allotment is coming up.

This year’s federal Savings Bonds campaign will run throughout the month of May. Secretary Anthony Principi is the chair of VA’s campaign and Under Secretary for Health Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D., the vice chair. There’s no need for sign-up cards—Savings Bond allotments can be started or modified using HR LINK\$.

VA will not be offering the new Series I bond. A volunteer canvasser from your organization will contact you soon about starting or increasing your allotment. For more information about the advantages of buying savings bonds, go to www.savingsbonds.gov. □

A rising sun cast curious shadows upon the grounds of the VA San Diego Healthcare System this Groundhog Day, as 30 local high school students spent the morning following in the footsteps of medical professionals there.

As part of National Groundhog Job Shadow Day, the Mt. Carmel High School students were teamed with San Diego VA employees to learn about the wide range of medical career possibilities and how the skills they learn in school can be applied to the workplace. “Offering students a closer look at various medical professions is an invaluable experience,” noted Gary J. Rossio, director of the VA San Diego Healthcare System. “We want to let them see a day in the life of a doctor, nurse or lab technician. You never know, some of them may one day return to the VA health care system to pursue a medical career.”

An 18-year-old senior with nursing aspirations spent the morning shadowing Steve J. Fulston, a registered nurse in the medical center’s Spinal Cord Injury Unit. After a tour of the area, Fulston explained how he got started in nursing and came to specialize in spinal cord injury. “She had a lot of questions,” he recalled. “I told her that it was a good time to get into nursing, and I also told her about VA and the benefits of working here, like



Flu Shots Could Save Nation \$1.3 Billion

It's hard to imagine something as simple as a flu shot having a national impact, but according to a recent VA study, if all of America's 94 million full-time workers, ages 18 to 64, received annual flu shots, the nation could save about \$1.3 billion each year.

The study, which appears in the March 12 issue of the American Medical Association's Archives of Internal Medicine, describes how VA researchers examined health, labor and economic statistics using a complex computer model that accounted for rates of illness from influenza, time lost from work, hourly wages, costs of vaccination and other factors. The results showed health costs could be reduced by an average of \$13.66 per person vaccinated.

According to lead author Dr. Kristin L. Nichol, of the Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical School, the study provides important evidence to support a national policy of routine flu vaccinations for all working adults. Current medical guidelines recommend routine flu vaccines for people age 50 and older, and for those in other high-risk groups.

Flu affects up to 25 percent of Americans each year and, according to 1995 figures, causes up to 75 million lost workdays and 22 million doctor visits annually. Symptoms generally include fever, sore throat, cough and headaches, and may last up to a week.

Buffalo Researchers Link Eye Movement with Ringing in the Ears

Reporting in the February 27 issue of Neurology, researchers from the Buffalo Division of the VA Western New York Health Care System and the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) have identified connections between tinnitus—or ringing in the ears—and eye movements.

The study suggests that tinnitus is a complex phenomenon involving more than one site in the brain, and may be due to an imbalance in brain systems. It is a unique concept and could point the way to new approaches to tinnitus and related disorders, which affect some 50 million Americans.

"This is the first research to show that a failure of the complicated way our brain systems talk to each other contributes to the cause of tinnitus," said lead author Alan H. Lockwood, M.D., a neurologist at the Buffalo VA Medical Center and professor of Neurology, Nuclear Medicine and Communicative Disorders and Sciences at UB. "Tinnitus is not the simple problem we hoped for."

Researchers used positron emission tomography to

identify specific parts of the brain associated with the ringing sounds in patients with gaze-evoked tinnitus, a rare disorder that causes a patient's ears to ring louder and higher in pitch whenever they move their eyes.

They found lateral gaze activated an extensive neural network in both controls and patients. However, in controls, lateral gaze suppressed brain activity in the auditory system. In patients with gaze-evoked tinnitus, it did not. "We believe tinnitus is the result of changes in the auditory circuits of the brain," said Lockwood. "Tinnitus might be viewed as the auditory-system equivalent to phantom limb pain," he added.

Tinnitus may be associated with anxiety, sleep disturbances, depression and other disabling symptoms. Currently, there is no effective drug treatment for this condition. Primary funding for the study came from a \$1.2 million grant from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, with additional support from The James H. Cummings Foundation of Buffalo, N.Y. The study's co-authors are Richard Salvi, Ph.D., and Robert Burkard, Ph.D.

San Diego Researchers Develop Blood Test to Detect Heart Failure

The expensive and time-consuming tests doctors currently use to detect congestive heart failure may soon be a thing of the past. Cardiologists from the VA San Diego Healthcare System have developed a quick and simple blood test to accurately detect heart failure in people admitted to hospital emergency rooms experiencing shortness of breath.

"The new test is easy; anyone can do it," said Alan Maisel, M.D., director of the Coronary Care Unit at the San Diego VA Medical Center and professor of Medicine at the University of California at San Diego. "This test helps save lives and time. With two drops of blood, you get results in 15 minutes." Maisel reported these findings in a study published in the February issue of the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

Researchers say the blood test detects elevated levels of the hormone B-type natriuretic peptide, or BNP, which is secreted by heart ventricles when pressure goes up, signaling the potential for heart failure. The test is analogous to a white blood cell count; it is more accurate than Pap smears for cervical cancer, PSA tests for prostate cancer and mammograms for breast cancer, with very few false positives, according to Maisel.

Until now, no blood test has been available to diagnose congestive heart failure in urgent-care settings. Patients brought into hospital emergency rooms experiencing shortness of breath are often required to take a series of protracted tests, including a physical exam, X-rays, stress tests and an expensive echocardiography test, which is not readily available in all hospital emergency rooms.

The BNP test, which was approved for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration late last year, is expected to be available soon for use with patients in hospital emergency rooms. VA physicians annually diagnose approximately 100,000 veterans with congestive heart failure. □

HONORS



and awards

Gerald F. DiBona, M.D., chief of Medical Service at the **Iowa City VA Medical Center**, was elected as a Foreign Member of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Goteborg, Sweden. The academic society was founded in 1778 by King Gustav II and subsequently gave rise to the Chalmers Institute of Technology and the University of Goteborg. DiBona has been a staff member at the Iowa City VAMC for 32 years. He is also professor and vice chairman of Internal Medicine and professor of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Iowa College of Medicine.

Registered nurse **Barbara Rounds**, from the **Cincinnati VA Medical Center**, was



Rounds

selected for induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2000. She joins an elite group of veterans selected to the Hall of Fame, including Congressional Medal of Honor recipients and former service members from the Buckeye State who went on to become U.S. Presidents.

Staff from the **VA Puget Sound Health Care System** received the Nicholas E. Davies Award for exemplary achievement in implementing the Computerized Patient Record System. Computerized patient records allow

health care providers to view progress notes, clinical entries, medical alerts, radiology images and test results. The Computer-based Patient Record Institute and Healthcare Open Systems and Trials, an organization dedicated to accelerating the development and deployment of computer-based patient record systems, presented the 2000 Davies Award to both VA Puget Sound and Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates.

Eliot Siegel, M.D., chief of Radiology/Imaging Services at the **VA Maryland Health Care System**, received the 2000 Excellence in Diagnostic Imaging Award in the innovation category at the Radiological Society of North America's Scientific Assembly and Annual Meeting held recently in Chicago. Siegel is a leading force in developing and testing the performance of filmless radiology. In 1993, he implemented the nation's first filmless medical imaging system at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, and is recognized as a pioneer and key figure in the acceptance of the Picture Archiving Communication System and filmless radiology in America and throughout the world.

The National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors elected **Thurston S. Smith**, a substance abuse program coordinator at the **Charleston, S.C., VA Medical Center**, as vice president of the association's Southeast Region. In this role, Smith serves on the association's Executive Board of Directors and as liaison

between the national office and its seven-state Southeast Region.

Mark Bigwood, from the **Salt Lake City, Utah, VA Medical Center**, and **Shirley Jackson**, from the **VA Boston Healthcare System**, were named VA minority veterans coordinators of the year for 2000. They were recognized for their outstanding service to minority veterans during an awards ceremony at the 5th annual training conference for minority veterans program coordinators held in Pittsburgh last fall.

During a meeting of the New Orleans City Council, the Mayor's Military Advisory Committee presented the Andrew Jackson Higgins Leadership Award to the **New Orleans VA Medical Center** for its leadership and community commitment in organizing

Stand Down 2000, the city's largest outreach event aimed at combating homelessness. The medical center teamed with the **New Orleans VA Regional Office**, the Louisiana State Department of Veterans Affairs, branches of the armed forces, local colleges and universities and hundreds of volunteers to organize the two-day September stand down. The event reached more than 1,000 veterans and their families.

Dr. Leslie Gonzalez-Rothi, a speech pathologist at the Gainesville Division of the **North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System** and program director of the Brain Rehabilitation Center, is slated to become president of the International Neuropsychological Society. She is the first speech pathologist selected for the position since the organization was founded in 1967. □

LVAAA Honors Two Employees

The Leadership VA Alumni Association presented its 2000 Exemplary Service Award to two VA employees who have demonstrated exceptional potential for



Hayes

increased leadership and managerial responsibilities. **Jason McClellan**, a veterans service representative at the **Little Rock, Ark., VA Regional Office**, won the award in the GS-9 through 12 category. He was a member of VA's LEAD training program in 2000 and was recently promoted to a supervisory position at the regional office. **Sandra Hayes**, a management and program assistant with the **VA San Diego Healthcare System**, won the award in the GS-8 and under category. She was cited for her strong organizational skills, work ethic and eagerness to learn. McClellan and Hayes were selected to receive the award from applicants nationwide.



McClellan



A Promise Made—A Commitment Kept, The Story of America's Civil War Era National Cemeteries, has arrived. The 287-page book describes the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)'s 59 Civil War era cemeteries and their acceptance into the National Register of Historic Places. **Therese Sammartino**, who recently retired from NCA's Office of Construction Management, wrote the book after carefully preparing and submitting applications to the National Register. She used colorful narratives and descriptive illustrations to trace each cemetery's Civil War origins, and bound the book in a decorative blue and gray cover complete with gold foil printing. **Michael Nacincik**, of NCA's Management Outreach Division, used desktop publishing programs to develop the book's layout, design and graphics. Copies were sent to each cemetery and Memorial Service Network director. NCA is investigating whether the Government Printing Office will make the book available to the public.

Worried about today's youth? Don't be! Just get to know a VA student volunteer, like high school junior **Catherine Mack**, a volunteer at the **Columbia, S.C., VA Medical Center**. She earned a perfect score of 1600 on the SAT college entrance exam. It was her second attempt, after scoring a 1540 on her first. The 16-year-old didn't want to be outdone by her brother James, a senior who earlier also scored a 1600. Although

no formal records exist, the organization that administers the test annually to more than 1 million high school students knows of no other circumstance where one child matched the perfect score of a sibling. "Catherine is outgoing, animated and eager to learn. Her respect for veterans is apparent in all that she does," says **Priscilla Creamer**, Voluntary Service officer. She has volunteered for two summers in the Extended Health Care Service Line, working in the pet therapy program, recreation therapy and the nursing home. According to recreation therapist **Thomas Streater**, "It has been a pleasure to have Catherine as a recreation volunteer. She is not only very professional, but extremely caring and friendly toward our veterans."

When the community called for volunteers to help build a house sponsored by Habitat for Humanity, employees from the **James A. Haley Veterans Hospital** in Tampa, Fla., stepped up to do their part. Some 50 employees donned overalls and armed themselves with shovels and hammers for the task at hand. They provided most of the labor for digging the footings, constructing the roof and interior walls, and installing the vinyl siding, while local vendors came through with money and materials to build the house for a low-income family. The army of VA volunteers completed most of the project in just two weekends and made a significant contribution to their community. Habitat for Humanity

dedicated the new house in early March, when the family moved into its new home.

An agreement between VA and the American Federation of Government Employees is paying big dividends to computer specialists. All GS-11 computer specialists working for the **Veterans Health Administration (VHA)** were awarded nearly \$1 million in back pay for overtime dating back to January 1995, plus time and a half for future overtime hours, after VHA determined they should have been covered under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The **National Cemetery Administration (NCA)** Web site—www.cem.va.gov—passed the 1 million hit mark last month. The popular site went online in March of 1996. Search engine and Web site reviewer Lycos ranked NCA's site among the top 5 percent of all sites on the Internet in 1998, and gave it a number-one rating in the section Government-Military-Armed Forces. Among NCA's more popular sites is the section on the Presidential Memorial Certificate, available to family members of honorably discharged veterans upon their deaths. NCA receives some 260 e-mail inquiries through its Web site each month.

VA patient safety got a boost in March with the unveiling of VetPro, an advanced, secure, Web-based health care professional credentialing system operational at **VHA** facilities nationwide. Credentialing assures that health care professionals have the appropriate degrees and current licenses for their clinical roles, while also verifying that practitioners have a track record of high-

quality and safe patient care. When a provider is credentialed using VetPro, a permanent, electronic file is created that will be immediately transportable throughout VA and ultimately across federal health care programs. As the system is used, the recredentialing process will be streamlined, as files need only be updated and not recreated.

Chattanooga, Tenn., VA National Cemetery staff interred one of their own late last year. Juanita Walker began her VA career as a clerk at the cemetery in 1969, but went on to become the first female superintendent in the former National Cemetery System. She served as superintendent at the Lebanon, Ky., Mountain Home, Memphis, Nashville and Los Angeles National Cemeteries before retiring in 1986.

Have you seen Security Alert, the VA Information Security Stand Down video? The **Employee Education Service** sent copies of the tape to VA facilities for viewing by all VA staff and contractors. The video focuses on the importance of protecting VA's computer systems and information resources.

The two-hour drive between the **Chattanooga VA Outpatient Clinic** and the **Murfreesboro, Tenn., VA Medical Center** is now a familiar route for **Charles "Speedy" Bearden**, a volunteer driver with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) van service who has logged more than 85,000 miles and 2,990 hours transporting veterans to their appointments at the medical center. He's been a volunteer driver for more than nine years, and when a DAV van is not available, he often drives vets in his own vehicle. □

HEROES



Fueled by alcohol and anger, a distraught veteran walked up to **Fred Smith**, chief of Police and Security at the **Oklahoma City VA Medical Center**, and whipped out a loaded .357 magnum. When Smith snatched the weapon from the man's hands, he began to cry and asked for help. Chief Smith calmly provided emotional support and escorted the man to the Mental Health Clinic for an evaluation. Afterward, the veteran asked if Smith could help escort him as he was being admitted to the inpatient Psychiatric Unit.



Using his knowledge of home loans, senior loan specialist **Kevin Gallagher** helped an Illinois veteran save his home from a property tax sale. It happened when the veteran called the **St. Paul, Minn., VA Regional Loan Center** and asked for help saving his home, which was being sold the next day because his mortgage company had not paid the property taxes. Gallagher contacted the county tax assessor's office to learn what would happen at the tax sale and the exact amount needed to stop it. He then contacted the mortgage company and arranged for the funds to be delivered by express mail to the tax office. Finally, he called the veteran and, because of the seriousness of the problem, recommended he attend the sale with enough money to pay the delinquent taxes. Fortunately, the veteran followed Gallagher's advice, because the funds did not arrive in time

to stop the sale and he had to pay the back taxes himself. The cost put a financial strain on his family and he needed reimbursement as soon as possible. Once again, Gallagher contacted the mortgage company. He obtained the express mail tracking information, and after discovering the tax office received the payment late on the day of the sale, arranged for them to return the veteran's check.



Thanks to the insightful thinking of **Laird Britton**, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) coordinator at the **VA Puget Sound Health Care System**, a tragedy was avoided. A veteran had scheduled a ride in the DAV van, but when the driver stopped at his house to pick him up, no one answered the door. The driver relayed this information to Britton, who knew the veteran was very punctual and always cancelled if he couldn't make an appointment. Concerned, Britton called the local police and asked them to investigate. The police entered the veteran's home and found him on the floor, unable to move. It turns out the veteran had been lying there for eight hours. Without Britton's call for help, the situation could have proved very tragic.



David Hescock, a resident of the REACH Program for homeless veterans at the Brockton Campus of the **VA Boston Healthcare System**, knew how to respond when a

veteran from the Chelsea Soldier's Home began choking during an annual dinner at the Braintree Moose Lodge. Hescock promptly came to the woman's aid, explaining that he was going to perform the Heimlich maneuver, and successfully clearing a chunk of corned beef that was blocking her airway.



Joan Clifford, R.N., had escaped old man winter's icy grip. The acting associate chief of Nursing Service at the Boston Campus of the **VA Boston Healthcare System** was enjoying a sun-filled vacation in the Dominican Republic. One day, her quiet getaway was interrupted by a woman's frantic cry for help. As soon as she heard the screams, Clifford looked up and saw a man sweating profusely and about to pass out. She jumped up from her chair and ran to the beach to get help from her friends **Marie Pizziferri, R.N.**, **Kathy Germany, R.N.**, **Susan Shannon, R.N.**, and **Paula Ronan-Simoni**, a respiratory therapist. Together, they attended to the vacationer, who was from Germany and spoke no English. Later, a physician arrived and took the man to the hospital.



Judi D. Warren, R.N., a critical care nurse at the Columbia, Mo., VA Medical Center, was driving home from the post office when she saw a strange sight—a pair of legs jutting out from some bushes by the side of the road. She decided to pull over to investigate and discovered a woman with skin cold to the touch, who seemed to have suffered a seizure. She immediately asked a passerby, who also stopped to help, to call for an ambulance. In no time, an ambulance,

several police officers and local news reporters were on the scene. Warren's actions may have saved the woman's life.



Nursing assistant **Dean Anderson** was walking down the main hallway in the Spinal Cord Injury building at the **Memphis, Tenn., VA Medical Center** when he saw a man standing on the narrow ledge outside a Plexiglas retaining wall. "Some patients were saying this guy was going to jump," said Anderson, "and I knew I had to do something, so I climbed across the ledge and pushed him back against the glass." Holding on to the man by his pants, Anderson tried to persuade him to climb back over the wall. "I tried to talk to him, but he wasn't responding. So I just said, 'look, one way or the other, you're going back over.'" Using his shoulders for leverage, he boosted the patient back over the wall where others pulled him to safety. "Looking back, I never thought of it as a big deal," he said. But others did. He received a Special Contribution Award for his heroic actions. □

Corrections

Our story in the March Have You Heard column about the VA employees who helped a Florida veteran fulfill his dying wish to hold and kiss the U.S. flag once more, contained some inaccuracies. The veterans benefits officer who was contacted by social worker Mercedes Mukati for help obtaining the flag is Albert, not Jorge, Ramos. She also contacted Larry Bergman, VFW service officer. Ramos obtained a flag from the Miami VA Police and Security Service and presented it to the veteran at his bedside.