



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
**Vanguard**

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**VA's New Leader—  
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**Inside:** Gober Farewell, 4 ☆ Last Hammer Awards, 12 ☆ Tornado Relief, 14

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### On the cover:

Anthony J. Principi, President Bush's choice for Secretary of Veterans Affairs, takes the oath before testifying at his Senate confirmation hearing. The former Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs returns to the Department in the top job. "I do intend to make a difference," the Vietnam veteran told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

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# INTRODUCING

Alvin Roberts

Alvin Roberts has faced his share of adversity. Life held few options for a young African American man raised by a single mother in Miami's Liberty City projects in the 1950s. Yet he made his way to college, attending Florida A&M University in Tallahassee for several semesters before facing the difficult task of having to choose between his future and his family's immediate needs. "My mom worked two jobs as a hospital dietitian and a restaurant waitress to raise five kids. I had to come back to help her," he said.

He did for a while, but with the escalation of the Vietnam War, he joined the Marines as a machine gunner. Within months, he landed on an aircraft carrier in the South China Sea. That was 1966. Years later, his experiences in Vietnam would again impact his life, this time under the crushing weight of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. But even that couldn't stop him from becoming one of south Florida's most esteemed community leaders.

Today, the medical data statistical clerk at the Miami VA Medical Center is a pillar of his community. The South Florida Federal Executive Board twice chose him as Federal Employee of the Year. Florida Governor Jeb Bush recently presented him with the Governor's Points of Light Award. Allstate Insurance Company and the Florida Commission on Community Service selected him as one of five Floridians honored with the Good Hands Florida Volunteer of the Year Award for 2000—and for good reason.

He's president of the board of directors of the Center for Independent Living of South Florida, a not-

for-profit organization that helps people with disabilities achieve independence and self-reliance. And he's been a mentor/role model to countless youths with the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project and Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Miami, showing at-risk kids how to avoid the perils of inner-city life—gangs, drugs, violence—just as he did years before.

For the past nine years he has voluntarily coordinated and presided over the Memorial Day Salute to Veterans, an event started by Rep.

Carrie Meek (D-Fla.). He's also a founding member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars/Liberty Post and has taken on leadership roles with the Vietnam Veterans of America.

"The good Lord has picked me up, turned me around and placed my feet on solid ground," said Roberts. "He gives me the strength to do the things that should be done without

worrying about failure."

Spirituality has always been Roberts' guide, and much of his inspiration is found in scripture. It's an inspiration kindled at Temple Missionary Baptist Church, where he serves in many capacities, and unleashed through his passion for helping those in need.

Around the medical center he has gained a reputation as someone who goes out of his way to not only help veterans navigate the unfamiliar waters of the VA health care system, but also the shifting currents of life. "Many times I've seen people in great need," he said. "And I want to help them see alternatives beyond their present circumstances." □

By Matt Bristol



Jenny Tankersley  
Public Affairs Officer  
Hampton, Va., VAMC

## Paying a Long-Overdue Debt to World War II Veterans



A year ago last May, I was inspired by an Associated Press (AP) story that appeared in *The Daily Press* newspaper here in Hampton, Va. The article

recounted how 39 World War II veterans had been honored through a program developed by the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services granting high school diplomas to area veterans.

Each of those veterans had been called to duty during the war before they had graduated from high school, with a promise they would receive their diplomas when they returned. Unfortunately, our nation failed them.

Although the veterans certainly returned to a grateful nation after the war, any promise of diplomas was quickly forgotten. The AP story revealed, in a powerful way, how grateful those 39 veterans were to finally receive, so many years later, the piece of parchment that had eluded them for so long.

At one time I had heard my father-in-law mention, somewhat regretfully, never having received his own high school diploma because the recruiters who had come to his school inspired him and his classmates to join the fight for freedom overseas. A combat veteran of the Army Air Corps, he had served as a tail gunner during WWII.

His decision to join the war effort early on did not seem to hinder his later success, however. He went on to become what was then known as a "self-made man." He worked as an engineer with a telephone company, and the combination of his professional success and smart investments allowed him to retire before he was 55.

So with my father-in-law and the

Massachusetts veterans in mind, I began a quest to make sure WWII veterans from my home state of West Virginia received their diplomas. I started my journey to make this personal dream a reality in early June 1999 by eliciting support from the director of the West Virginia Department of Veterans Affairs, with whom I had worked when I was assigned at the Huntington, W.Va., VA Medical Center.

That same month, he wrote to the superintendent of the state Department of Education. Hearing nothing for months, I requested support from Senator Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), since I still own property in West Virginia. Senator Byrd responded, and asked that I contact West Virginia state officials and legislators.

A resolution was initiated to pass legislation facilitating this program to recognize West Virginia's veterans. I recently received notification from the West Virginia Department of Veterans Affairs that "Operation Recognition" has finally become a reality. Publicity is underway inviting all WWII veterans to apply for this recognition. All they need to do is attach a copy of their military discharge document (DD-214) with

dates reflecting their period of military service, which will prove the year they left to enter WWII.

Clearly, this has little to do with me as an individual. But to me, this is what being a VA employee is all about. Not just helping veterans at our work site, but taking our roles as employees to heart, and doing what we can as private citizens to recognize those brave Americans who put their lives on the line for this great nation.

I did this not just for my father-in-law, who is now 74 and has no real need for a diploma anymore, but as part of my commitment to doing what I believe we are dedicated to do—to *care* for our nation's veterans. With the help of the state Department of Education and the support of Senator Byrd, a long-overdue debt owed to many West Virginia veterans by their country will finally be paid. □

*Editor's Note: Tankersley recently contacted Disabled American Veterans officials in the Hampton area about her initiative, and they are working with Virginia legislators to introduce a similar bill in the upcoming state legislative session. Passage of the Virginia bill is anticipated in October of this year.*



### Crenna Honored

Former Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober, right, presented the National Veteran Salute Award to actor Richard Crenna during the American Veteran Awards (AVA) ceremony in Beverly Hills, Calif., in December. Crenna, a World War II Army veteran, served as chairman of the 2000 National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans. AVA, founded by the Veterans Foundation Incorporated, honors the country's past, present and future military and promotes the military's role in everyday society.

# Anthony J. Principi Named VA Secretary

*Former VA Deputy Secretary vows he'll be a 'passionate advocate' for veterans*

President George W. Bush chose a familiar name to head the Department of Veterans Affairs in his administration. Anthony J. Principi was the first Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, named by former President George Bush in 1989. The Navy veteran also served as Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the last months of the elder Bush's administration.

"Tony Principi has spent much of his life working to improve the lives of his fellow veterans, and he will do an excellent job in ensuring that our nation's veterans get the care, treatment and respect they so richly deserve," Bush said in announcing the nomination on December 29.

"I know of no mission more worthwhile than serving the men and women who have so honorably

served their nation," said Principi in accepting the nomination. The Senate confirmed Principi's nomination on January 23.

At his confirmation hearing before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on January 18, Principi made it clear that improving the benefits claims processing system will be his top priority. "Many veterans have lost faith in VA's ability to fairly and promptly decide their claims for benefits," he said. "Not without reason. It takes too long to decide a claim. And the error rate remains too high."



*Principi answers a question during his confirmation hearing.*

Principi said he's aware of efforts already underway in the Veterans Benefits Administration to address the problems, but more needs to be done. He said he plans to appoint a task force to conduct a "top to bottom examination of VA benefits processing." The task force would be given a narrow charter and a short

## Gober Says Goodbye

*On January 19, former Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober said farewell to VA employees from headquarters during a live nationwide broadcast aired on the VA Knowledge Network. Here are some excerpts from his remarks:*

It is hard to believe that today is the last day of my eight years with you. When I left Arkansas for Washington back in 1993, I came with one goal: to improve the way VA served veterans and their families. That goal never changed. Together, you and I opened doors for veterans. Together, we made sure our nation's commitment to care for those who served was honored. Together, we made sure that this Department was on the right track.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a program I know has touched the lives of every one of you—a program called One VA. When I came to Washington it was evident that the organizations which ran our hospitals, our benefits offices, and our national cemeteries were not working well together as a team.

They suffered from what is called stovepipe management. They operated as separate organizations with goals and objectives that may not have been mutually beneficial to veterans.

I know many of you have worked hard to knock over those stovepipes. We've got them leaning over now, but they are not down for the count yet. I hope you will keep up the good fight.

Veterans see only one VA when they turn to us for service. They should get that service promptly. So many of you now go the additional step to help veterans get the service they have earned. I thank you for that.

During my tenure at VA, you and I have done a great deal that's right for America's veterans. Although these past eight years have gone by much too fast, each day has posed both challenges and opportunities. We have had many successes, and a few disappointments.

I know that there is still much to be done, but I am very proud of the great strides we have made. I leave knowing that we are going in the right direction. We are on the right path. And I thank each and every one of you for your work on behalf of my fellow veterans—without which nothing could have been accomplished.

Goodbye, good luck, and may God bless all of you.

**Hershel W. Gober**  
Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs

fuse to come up with practical solutions to claims processing problems.

Principi commended the VA health care system's emphasis on patient safety and quality care, but said he wants to focus more attention on improving access to health care and making better use of limited resources. He said he'd like to convene a second task force to review the health care system. Its membership would be drawn from veterans service organizations, "forward-looking VA employees, and VA's partners in health care delivery," he said.

VA's information technology problems also need attention, Principi told the committee. "VA has absorbed billions of dollars allocated to improving its ability to collect, process and communicate data," he said. "Frankly, I do not see improvements proportional to the resources consumed."

Most recently, the 56-year-old combat-decorated Vietnam veteran was president of QTC Medical Services, Inc., a San Diego-based firm that provides independent medical examinations and medical administration services. In 1996, Principi chaired a 12-member Congressional Commission on Military Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance, charged with reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of benefits and services available to active duty service members and veterans and making recommendations to Congress on needed improvements.

He also served as the Republican Chief Counsel and Staff Director for the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. The 1967 U.S. Naval Academy graduate first saw active duty aboard the destroyer USS Joseph P. Kennedy. In Vietnam, he commanded a river patrol unit in the Mekong Delta, and earned several medals and decorations, including the Bronze Star and the Navy Combat Action Medal.

Principi earned a law degree from Seton Hall University in 1975 and was assigned to the Navy's Judge Advocate General Corps in San Diego. He later transferred to Washington, D.C., to serve as legislative counsel for the Navy. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have three sons. □

## Third Annual Survey Shows Federal Workers Satisfied With Their Jobs

Sixty-three percent of federal workers who participated in a third annual government-wide employee survey said they are satisfied with their jobs. That's an overall job satisfaction rate that is comparable to private industry.

And the results were similar at VA. In fact, VA was one of three agencies, along with the Army and Navy, showing the most improvement over last year's survey results. Sixty-six percent of VHA employees, 65 percent of VBA employees, and 65 percent of employees in other elements of VA (including NCA) said they are satisfied with their jobs. In 1999, 58 percent of VHA employees, 58 percent of VBA employees, and 61 percent of other VA employees expressed job satisfaction.

The survey of federal employees was sponsored by the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). In addition to overall job satisfaction, the results revealed improvements in several other areas, including: recognition for doing good work; clear defini-

tions of good performance; respect for differences among individuals; electronic access to information needed to do a good job; and an emphasis on using plain language to explain government services and regulations.

VA employees who responded to the survey joined their fellow federal workers in giving the lowest ratings to the government hiring process. They gave the highest scores to the presence of customer service goals in the agency, while federal employees overall rated the quality of work done in their work group highest.

NPR and OPM initiated the surveys in 1998 as a way of gauging federal employees' perceptions of their workplace in the face of growing competition from the private sector for skilled workers. The 32-question survey was mailed in September by OPM to a random sample of more than 50,000 employees in 49 government agencies. Forty-two percent of the surveys were returned. More information on the survey is available at: [www.employeesurvey.gov](http://www.employeesurvey.gov). □

## Former VA Administrator Dies



Turnage

Thomas K. Turnage, 77, former VA administrator, died December 10 of cancer at his home in Rancho Mirage, Calif. Appointed to the top VA post by President Ronald Reagan in 1986, General Turnage served until 1989 and was the last administrator of the Veterans Administration before VA became a cabinet department.

He played a key role in preparing the agency for elevation to cabinet status. At the time, VA was the largest independent agency in

the federal government, with more than 240,000 employees and an annual budget of more than \$25 billion.

A native of Texas, Turnage spent 39 years in the Army, including combat service during World War II and the Korean War. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and Bronze Star, among many decorations. He retired in 1982 as a major general.

Before his appointment as VA administrator, Turnage served as the director of the Selective Service and as an executive in a blue-ribbon manpower planning task force under Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger. Following a memorial service in Rancho Mirage, he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. □

# EEO Champions Shine at Awards Ceremony

Six of VA's top Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) champions took center stage during the Secretary's 13th Annual Equal Employment Opportunity Awards Program at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C. They were honored with the Department's highest award for those who contribute to VA equal opportunity programs.

Recipients were selected in five award categories. In the non-supervisory employees category, Carol Mather, the senior EEO/Affirmative Employment specialist at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center, was honored for redesigning the facility's Affirmative Employment Plan, organizing the International Day Celebration, coordinating the medical center director's EEO Excellence



Winners in the Secretary's 13th Annual EEO Awards Program with former Acting Secretary Hershel Gober (center). They are, left to right: David Whatley, Elizabeth Branin, Carol Mather, Lynda Atchley, Audrey Oatis and Kevin Lind.

Awards Program, and managing 33 students from the Washington, D.C., SummerWorks Program.

Lynda Atchley, the EEO manager at the Columbia, Mo., VA Medical Center, took the top honor in the

category for supervisors and managers through GS-14 and equivalent. She was recognized for the leadership, knowledge and expertise in all aspects of equal opportunity that she brings to the medical center's exemplary EEO program. She also trained more than 1,500 employees at 12 VA medical centers on issues such as sexual harassment, discrimination complaints and cultural diversity.

David Whatley, who retired as director of the Houston VA Medical Center, was honored in the managers and executives GS-15 and

above category for fostering an atmosphere of fairness and equity among medical center employees through strategic planning and reorganization initiatives.

In the program representatives

## New Life for an Old Cell Phone

Got an old cell phone lying in a drawer collecting dust? Consider donating it to a worthy cause. Narda Saunders, director of the Employee Assistance Program in VA Central Office (VACO), spearheaded an effort to collect employees' old cell phones to help victims of domestic violence in Washington, D.C.

The 100 phones collected from VACO employees this past fall were donated to the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence Victim Advocacy Program. VA was the leading government agency donating cell phones to the program.

The phones will be refurbished, reprogrammed, and distributed to domestic violence victims, who can use them to call for help. Cell phones used for this cause are programmed to dial 911 and a domestic violence advocate.

"It is difficult for many em-

ployees to find the time to give back to their communities through volunteer work," said Saunders, "but the cell phone donation program shows them there are many different ways they can contribute to society and really make a difference."

VA employees outside the D.C. area who are interested in donating cell phones to this cause can contact any domestic violence agency in their community or visit [www.donateaphone.com](http://www.donateaphone.com) to find out if there is a collection point in their area, Saunders said. You can also mail phones in any condition (in-



Narda Saunders, director of the Employee Assistance Program in VA Central Office (VACO), collected 100 old cell phones from VACO employees to help domestic violence victims in Washington, D.C.

cluding the battery and charger if available) to: Call to Protect, c/o Motorola, Dept. P, 1580 E. Ellsworth Road, Ann Arbor, Mich., 48108. You can request a tax receipt for the donation. □



*A ceremony held on the grounds of the Martinsburg, W.Va., VA Medical Center to present Korean War service medals to 65 veterans on Veterans Day opened with the presentation of a World War I medal to 99-year-old former POW Frank Buckles.*



*Captain Weon-Sik Yu, Korean Naval attaché from Washington, D.C., presented the Korean War service medals at the ceremony, assisted by Martinsburg VA Medical Center Director George M. Moore, Jr.*

## ***Martinsburg VAMC Hosts Korean Medal Ceremony***

As activities commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korean War continue across the nation and in the Republic of Korea, many U.S. veterans of that conflict are marking the occasion by applying for the Republic of Korea War Service Medal offered by the Korean government.

In fact, the highlight of a daylong schedule of Veterans Day activities on the grounds of the Martinsburg, W.Va., VA Medical Center was the presentation of 65 of these medals to Korean War veterans or their next of kin during a special ceremony. VA medical center staff worked closely

with local and state veterans service organizations, VA regional offices and the Air Force Personnel Center, which processes the applications, to plan the largest single presentation of the medal yet during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration.

Captain Weon-Sik Yu, Korean Naval attaché from the Korean Embassy in Washington, D.C., presented the medals, assisted by Martinsburg VAMC Director George M. Moore, Jr., and Deputy Director of VHA's Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group Robert Elliott.

Outside the 1,000-person tent

where the medal presentations took place, a grove of Korean Dogwood trees was planted and a marble memorial to Korean War veterans was dedicated. Frank Buckles, a 99-year-old former POW, also received his World War I commemoration medal during the ceremony.

Other activities during the day included a 5K run and 1K wheelchair race originating and ending on the medical center grounds, and a parade featuring antique cars, vintage military vehicles, school bands, veterans service organizations and other community groups.

To apply for the Korean War service medal, veterans must provide a copy of their military discharge document (DD-214), or a corrected version of that document (DD-215). National Guard members must provide their statement of service equivalent (NGB Form 22).

Veterans can apply for the medal at any time during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration period, which runs through 2003. Next of kin of eligible deceased veterans may also apply for the medal. The medal is being distributed free of charge to veterans by the Air Force.

For more information on how to apply for the medal, call the Air Force Personnel Center at (800) 558-1404, or write to HQ AFPC/DPPRA, 550 C St. West, Suite 12, Randolph Air Force Base, Tex., 78150-4714. Information is also available on the Internet at [www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/awards](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/awards). □

### **EEO Awards (cont.)**

category, Elizabeth Branin, an EEO program manager at the Philadelphia VA Regional Office & Insurance Center, shared the top spot with Audrey Oatis, the EEO/Affirmative Employment program manager at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. Branin was honored for her involvement with all Special Emphasis Programs and for heightening the awareness of sexual harassment and discrimination. Oatis' leadership abilities were cited as key to the enhancement of the Atlanta VAMC's EEO program.

Rounding out the award recipients was Kevin Lind, a vocational rehabilitation specialist who runs the Transitional Work Program at the Tuscaloosa, Ala., VA Medical Center.

He was honored for successfully planning and implementing the facility's Transitional Work Program, which helps veterans with disabilities or illnesses that have kept them from returning to the work force.

"Today, for the thirteenth consecutive year, we honor some extraordinary men and women who have gone the extra mile to help our Department attract and maintain a diverse work force," said former VA Acting Secretary Hershel Gober during the awards ceremony. "We recognize their individual contributions and achievements in furthering the goals of our EEO program. And we hope that, by honoring them, we can motivate others to emulate their example." □

# Talking Diversity, Equal Opportunity with New DAS

Armando Rodriguez, VA's new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity (DM/EEO), outlines his plan for creating a diverse work force with an infectious enthusiasm. He comes to VA with a proven track record of striving for and achieving diversity in the federal work force. The former Director of Diversity for Government-wide Initiatives at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently took a few moments with V*A*nguard to describe the vision he brings to VA.

**Q:** Many of VA's senior managers will be eligible for retirement in the coming years, and the graying work force gives us an opportunity to seek diversity in the selection of new employees. What steps would you take to ensure the demographics of the future VA work force more accurately reflect those of the United States population?

**A:** In recent years, we have heard a lot about "work force planning." In fact, I know we are doing work force planning here at VA. However, my concern is that work force planning is being done void of work force analysis specific to diversity and affirmative employment. First, I would ensure that work force planning incorporates diversity work force analysis. Not only would I identify the aging work force in terms of retirement eligibility by location, occupation, and grade, but also I would incorporate race, national origin, and gender. This will result in knowing which specific positions will require recruitment but also knowing which population is underrepresented and therefore should be targeted in the recruitment process.

For example, let's say for the sake of argument that we determine through work force planning that we will need to recruit for social workers. And we know that the Social Work occupation has underrepresentation of African Americans. I would then determine the grade level for which I will recruit and the geographic location of the position. If I were recruiting at the entry level, I would seek to

partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities that offer a master's degree in Social Work. I would establish a presence at the college or university that offers the greatest potential to land African American Social Work graduates interested in working for VA.

If we were to utilize this approach in all our recruitment, I venture to say that we would not only accomplish our work force planning goals but would also meet our diversity goals and have a future VA work force that more accurately reflects the U.S. work force.

**Q:** Is this a step you've taken in the past?

**A:** Yes, as the Director of Diversity at the Office of Personnel Management, I was on a management team that conceptualized, designed and developed a career intern program. Following the process I just described, we were successful in identifying five mission-critical occupations where we would be experiencing significant retirements and determining which populations were underrepresented. The result was that over 60 percent of the hires were minorities. Thirty-three percent of those hired were Hispanic where previously OPM only had about 2.8 percent of hires being Hispanic. The lesson is that targeted recruitment is not only legal but also truly effective.

**Q:** OPM has recently highlighted the low number of Hispanics in the federal government. What measures would you take to ensure that underrepresented segments of the population have the opportunity to obtain VA employment?

**A:** At OPM, I was the principal architect of the Hispanic hiring initiative called the 9-point plan that heightened the fact that Hispanics are the only minority group underrepresented in the federal government. At VA, I will be diligent about incorporating diversity into work force planning as I described earlier. As a matter of fact, I have drafted a guide to work force analysis that I hope to publish and make available to all executives, managers,



Rodriguez

and supervisors to assist them in conducting work force analysis. My office is also preparing a work force profile for the Department that identifies areas where potential future discrimination complaints may be filed. My hope is that by using these tools, we can achieve a diversified work force and reduce the number of discrimination complaints filed by applicants and employees of the Department.

**Q:** VA spends a tremendous amount of time, money and energy investigating and resolving EEO complaints. What can be done to reduce the number of complaints filed or to make the resolution process less costly?

**A:** The last figure I saw was about 4,000 official complaints, and it is estimated that to resolve a complaint costs approximately \$50,000 to \$75,000 each. This is a tremendous financial liability, so we obviously need to take steps to reduce the number of complaints filed. As an executive, I have to assess what my role is in this process. Am I a part of the problem or solution or both? Am I somehow contributing to complaints? If so, then I need to identify the root cause and effect. DM/EEO is looking at root cause to determine what are the recurring themes. We have been able to identify a few. For example, some supervisors may not



# St. Louis Team Gives Homeless Vets Final Honors

**W**hat happens when homeless or indigent people die and no family members or friends come forward to bury them? In most places, unless the deceased person is verified to be a veteran eligible for burial in a national cemetery, he or she is buried in a "potter's field" in an unmarked grave.

Two veterans in St. Louis talked about this sad situation and decided it should not continue. One is a past national commander of the American Legion and the other a retired Army general and vice president and general manager of a group of local funeral homes. The result is a coordinated program involving veterans organizations, funeral homes and VA facilities that buries these veterans with honors in VA national cemeteries—and has the potential to spread nationwide.

In many locations, staff of VA medical centers and regional offices work together to establish eligibility for national cemetery interment for veterans who do not have family or friends to arrange for burial at their death. Some national cemeteries hold monthly memorial services to honor

recently buried veterans who had no family present for an individual service. A new element, beginning in St. Louis, is a national funeral corporation contributing its services, as well, to the One VA effort.

Since last May, when St. Louis County Veterans Services Manager John Eckhoff formed the St. Louis Homeless Veterans Burial Program Committee, six deceased veterans have been buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (JBNC). Now the program is poised to begin in Houston, Louisville, Ky., and Kansas City, Mo.

Ralph Church and Jan Klahs, director and assistant director of the national cemetery, are responsible for establishing the veteran's eligibility for burial. And the cemetery receives the flag presented in the veteran's name, to be used for its "avenue of flags." But a One VA series of actions preceding the burial also give the local VA regional office and the medical center important roles to make it happen.

Individual committee members have specific tasks to assure a swift response after the death of a homeless veteran. The medical examiner for St. Louis County contacts examiners for five surrounding Missouri counties to try to locate relatives or friends to pay the cost of a burial. When none can be found, the examiner notifies Eckhoff.

The county veterans services manager contacts one of the three local VA facilities, depending on

how much information he has that may help establish eligibility for national cemetery burial. At the St. Louis VA Medical Center, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program office knows if the veteran has used the program and may know of family or friends to contact. If the veteran was previously hospitalized at the VAMC, the details clerk can establish eligibility for burial. The regional benefits office may determine the character of the veteran's military discharge if it's in question and sometimes learns of relatives who qualify for survivors' benefits.

The JBNC staff have the final role in verifying burial eligibility. If the veteran's record does not exist at the regional office, JBNC staff contact the National Personnel Records Center. Though most of the cemetery staff's activities on behalf of the veteran don't exceed what they do for other burials, requesting military funeral honors from the Department of Defense steps into the role that a funeral home or family usually plays.

At the cemetery interment service itself, a VAMC chaplain provides committal services. Missouri's National Guard renders honors.

One of the two co-creators of the program, retired Army general Bill Branson, made sure the veterans' burials resemble those of many others. He asked his former employer, the Hoffmeister, Kriegshauser funeral homes in St.

*(continued on page 11)*

## New DAS Q&A (cont.)

be aware of or understand their responsibilities in the area of equal employment opportunity, affirmative employment, civil rights, or diversity. Others may not be aware that their method and style of communication may be contributing to an unhealthy workplace. DM/EEO's goal is to identify these problem areas, develop the tools for corrective action, and help supervisors gain the necessary skills that will eliminate their liabilities.

In addition, using the work force profile we are developing, the guide to work force analysis, and consulting with DM/EEO, we can jointly identify potential problems and develop correction strategies before they become complaints. Along these same lines, I would like to develop a curriculum on cultural diversity that will certify each executive, supervisor, and manager has met the competency necessary to be a future VA leader. □

## Honoring the Forgotten

One VA efforts have been providing dignified burial for otherwise abandoned veterans for years. In New York City last spring, a police detective investigating a death found a VA card on the body and contacted Army military police. The Army called M'Liz McLendon of NCA in VACO, who contacted the morgue and the New York VARO.

File searching by the VARO's Barbara Chiariello and VHA headquarters homeless programs staff established that the deceased was a veteran once seen at the Atlanta VAMC, and the VARO there had a claims file. X-rays from the New York VAMC were found confirming the man's identify. Chiariello also discovered the man received a VA pension and had money in his account. She contacted a funeral home and arranged burial preparation. Calverton, N.Y., National Cemetery Director Pat Hallinan arranged military funeral honors and represented VA at the man's interment service at the cemetery. □

# Stand Down 2000: Mission Accomplished



*Onlookers wait their turn as veteran Charles Daniels inspects his freshly shaved head, courtesy of Deborah A. Anderson, an experienced hairdresser and program support assistant in VA Central Office who volunteered at the Washington, D.C., Stand Down.*

VA Medical Center sponsored an annual stand down called Winterhaven. The two-day event was held at the Patterson Street VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic and attracted nearly 600 veterans. They received hot meals, cold weather clothing items like heavy winter jackets and boots, an array of health

screenings, job counseling and even home referrals. "This is a fantastic turnout," said Dewayne Vaughan, chief of Voluntary Service at the Washington, D.C., VAMC. "We had about 70 veterans waiting in line when we opened, which just shows there's always a need for this type of program."

Attending his first stand down was 67-year-old Glasgow Brown, who served 15 years with the United States Marine Corps, but now lives at a local homeless shelter. He heard about Winterhaven through his shelter and, though impressed with the wide variety of services available, offered a few suggestions of his own. "They should be doing this more than once a year," he said, smiling.

Like most stand downs, Winterhaven was supported through partnerships with community agencies and local veterans service organizations and drew volunteers from VA offices throughout the area. Volunteer Michelle Hill, a rating analyst technician at the Washington, D.C., VA Regional Office, poured steaming cups of hot coffee for veterans as they filed into the large green tent set up as a staging area.

Though it was her first stand down, she volunteers regularly with the local AMVETS Auxiliary and felt right at home lending a hand to help homeless veterans. "I was born and raised in Washington, D.C., and this is my way of giving something back to the community," she said.

Rodney Rector, a nurse manager in the Operating Room at the Washington, D.C., VAMC, has been volunteering at Winterhaven for the past three years and worked like a seasoned pro in the influenza vaccination station. He smiled and joked with veterans, putting them at ease before he skillfully administered their flu shot. "I come to the stand down to provide a much-needed service for these veterans," said Rector. "When it comes to volunteering, some people act too busy and just don't get involved, but coming out here is rewarding in itself, and it really makes you appreciate how good you've got it."

One after another, veterans filed in to speak with Arne von Kalka, a readjustment counseling therapist with the Washington, D.C., Vet Center. "This is a very effective way to reach out to disenfranchised veterans," said von Kalka. "Because the stand down is held at a clinic, we can meet the veterans, develop a rapport, and then refer them to on-site treatment services."

He said many of the homeless veterans he met at the stand down are struggling with a dual diagnosis of substance abuse and PTSD, and they have often been in and out of various treatment programs. "What commonly happens," explained von Kalka, "is the substance abuse in conjunction with the PTSD will raise its ugly head and these veterans are unable to deal with it. They will lose their jobs, their homes and even their families. They fall through the cracks and end up on the street." Fortunately, community events like stand downs and the volunteers who organize them are there to catch these veterans when they fall.

Though Stand Down 2000 has come to a close, VA continues to partner with veterans service organizations and community organizations to reach out to homeless veterans and help them make the transition to self-sufficiency. Since the first stand down was held in San Diego in 1988, VA has helped sponsor an average of 120 stand downs annually and will continue to do so in the years ahead. □

**By Matt Bristol**

**A**t the dawn of the year 2000, VA reaffirmed its commitment to helping homeless veterans by pledging to hold 200 stand downs during the upcoming year—at least one in every state—with the goal of reaching 100,000 homeless veterans. The mission was named Stand Down 2000, and grew into a Department-wide observance recognized by the White House Millennium Council. So how did we do?

VA held its 200th stand down on December 14 in Indianapolis, Ind., and several more took place through the remainder of the year. According to Pete Dougherty, director of VA's Homeless Veterans Programs Office, the achievement was made possible only through the collaborative efforts of VA, veterans service organizations, community groups and thousands of volunteers. "Every veteran who served our nation is deserving of our respect," said Dougherty, "and efforts like Stand Down 2000 show that tens of thousands of [homeless] veterans are interested in getting off the streets and rebuilding their lives."

For many homeless veterans, the warm, friendly environment offered at stand downs is a welcome relief from the cold realities of life on the streets. And just as nighttime temperatures dipped below the freezing mark in the nation's capital last November, the Washington, D.C.,

## Indigent Burials (cont.)

Louis, to donate all of the logistical preparations for a funeral, including providing clothing, a casket and transportation to the cemetery.

The other program creator was Joe Frank, a disabled Vietnam veteran and past national commander of the American Legion. Frank contacted Eckhoff, who set up the committee.

The local mortuary firms are affiliated with Service Corporation International (SCI), the world's largest mortuary company, with nearly 4,000 affiliates worldwide. SCI officials emphasize that the program is not designed to compete with services offered by others. In St. Louis and Louisville, at least, the estimated number of burials for homeless, indigent veterans is 12 to 24 a year.

In Houston, the national cemetery will tap its veterans service organization honors detachment for military funeral honors as it does for all interment services. For Louisville, the closest open national cemetery is at Lebanon, Ky., about 65 miles away. For Kansas City, SCI affiliates may bury unclaimed deceased veterans in a veterans section of their own cemetery. However, when requests are for national cemetery burial, Leavenworth, Kan., National Cemetery is available about 35 miles away.

Calling the SCI effort "a program created by veterans for veterans of special need," Branson said he sees potential for it to be replicated in some 17 locations around the country where SCI affiliate firms are near national cemeteries.

Said SCI president Jerry Pullins, "As a veteran of two tours of duty in Vietnam, I feel we are privileged to participate in this display of gratitude to those whose contributions to our security would otherwise have been forgotten."

Among VA participants, the feeling is shared. Mary Beth Barnett, a veterans service representative at the St. Louis VARO, described the service for the first of the six interments she has attended, adding, "This was the proudest moment of my VA career." □

By Jo Schuda

# VA Hosts AMSUS Annual Meeting

"Information Management: One Key to Healthcare Success" was the theme of the 107<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS). VA hosted the event, with Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite serving as president and keynote speaker.

More than 6,500 representatives from VA, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Public Health Service convened in Las Vegas November 5-10. A highlight of the program was VA's Information Technology Showcase. Deputy Under Secretary for Health Dr. Frances M. Murphy provided the opening address for the showcase, which offered hands-on training for the Computerized Patient Record System and VISTA Integrated Imaging. "If the Veterans Health Administration [VHA] can give our providers the technology tools they need, then VHA can provide enhanced quality care," said Murphy.

Garthwaite's address emphasized the importance of patient-focused health care and screening patients for early detection of disease or illness. He also talked about "Health eVet, Health eVault," a prototype Internet medical records system that is patient-controlled, secure and interconnected.

He said this new system would give patients control over their complete medical record, and patients would grant access to providers. Providers would be able to electronically conduct health risk assessments and health education, develop a personalized health plan, and conduct private discussion groups in a secure environment. Garthwaite also predicted marked improvement in the quality of health care in the future, with physicians taking on new, specialized roles.

AMSUS honored Veterans Day with a concert by the VA-National Medical Musical Group. Entertainer Art Linkletter and Adrian Cronauer, of "Good Morning Vietnam" fame, served as masters of ceremonies for the performance at the Las Vegas Hilton Theater. The "Celebration of Faith and Patriotism" was directed by Dr. Victor S. Wahby, director of the VHA Office of Special Projects,

who founded the group of musically talented VA health care professionals. The following awards were presented to VA employees during the meeting:

■ Ray E. Brown Award – **James A. Christian**, director of the **Asheville, N.C., VA Medical Center**;

■ John D. Chase Award for Physician Executive Excellence – **Dr. Jayendra H. Shah**, chief medical officer for the **Southern Arizona VA Health Care System**;

■ Clinical Nursing Excellence Award – **Marilyn Lynn**, **Denver VA Medical Center**;

■ The Founder's Medal – **Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite**;

■ The Gorgas Medal – **Dr. John D. Hamilton**, director of the **VA Research Center on AIDS and HIV Infections**;

■ Philip Hench Award – **Dr. Bruce Richardson**, chief of Rheumatology at the **Ann Arbor, Mich., VA Medical Center**;

■ Outstanding Federal Healthcare Executive Award – **Jonathan H. Gardner**, chief executive officer of the **Southern Arizona VA Health Care System**;

■ Physician Assistant Award – **Larry D. Franklin**, **Bonham, Texas, VA Medical Center**;

■ Carl A. Schlack Award – **W. Mark Tucker**, chief of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Section at the **Tampa, Fla., VA Medical Center**;

■ Paul Dudley White Award – **Karl E. Hammermeister**, staff cardiologist at the **Denver VA Medical Center**;

■ Young Federal Health Care Administrator Award – **Ralph T. Gigliotti**, associate director of the **Denver VA Medical Center**; and

■ William C. Porter Lecture Award – **Dr. A. Thomas McLellan**, **Philadelphia VA Medical Center**.

Next year's annual meeting of AMSUS will be held November 4-9 in San Antonio. The association was established in 1891 and incorporated by an act of Congress in 1903. The Constituent Services of the association include the medical departments of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Public Health Service and VA. □

By **Diana Struski**  
**San Antonio VA Medical Center**

# Hammer Award Program Comes to an End

Nearly seven years after former Vice President Al Gore presented the very first National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) Hammer Award to a VA team, the Department received one of the last awards given in the program. The last VA Hammer Award to be approved was presented to the Compensation and Pension Records Interchange (CAPRI) Project Team on January 12 during a VA Central Office (VACO) ceremony.

This team was recognized for developing and testing a computer information system designed to enhance and speed up the compensation and pension claims process for veterans. It was a One VA project, involving team members from VACO, the St. Petersburg, Fla., VA Regional Office, VISN 8 (Bay Pines, Fla.), and the Nashville, Tenn., and Bay Pines VA Medical Centers.

Since the New York VA Regional Office won that first award in March 1994 for streamlining its operations and improving services to veterans, more than 1,300 Hammer Awards have been presented to teams of federal employees, state and local government employees and private citizens. The last Hammer Awards went to the IRS and the General Services Administration. NPR closed its doors on January 20.

The former vice president created the Hammer Award to recognize teams of individuals for their contributions to his initiative to build a new government that works better and costs less. The award itself—a \$6 hammer, a ribbon, and a note from Gore in an aluminum frame—symbolized the \$400 Pentagon hammer that inspired the then-vice president to launch his reinventing government effort.

Recipients were honored for initiatives that met one or more of NPR's reinventing government principles, including improving customer service, cutting red tape, empowering employees, and

getting back to basics. Over the years, VA teams won a total of 170 Hammer Awards.

The following VA teams won Hammer Awards in 2000:

■ **Ex-POW "One VA" Case Management Claims Assistance Team at the Jackson, Miss., VA Medical Center and VA Regional Office** – for developing a process and special assistance team to efficiently and effectively provide medical and benefit services to former POWs.

■ **Sleep Laboratory Team at the Roseburg, Ore., VA Medical Center** – for developing an advanced technology sleep laboratory with a private sector hospital, overcoming many obstacles to establish a mutually beneficial working operation.

■ **Tri-Fab Implementation Team in North Little Rock, Ark.** – for developing a system to provide artificial limbs for veterans in VISN 16 (Jackson, Miss.) that is cost-effective and has reduced waiting times from 30-45 days to 7-10 days.

■ **Women Veterans Network Team in Nashville, Tenn.** – for developing Angel's Landing, Tennessee's first transitional living facility for homeless women veterans.

■ **Virtual Learning Center Internet Design Team at VA Central Office** – for creating a systematic mechanism for sharing the informal knowledge, innovations and best practices in VA.

■ **Home Health Care Medical Waste Disposal Team at the Sioux Falls, S.D., VA Medical & Regional Office Center** – for partnering with the local health department and a pharmacy chain to develop a program for the safe disposal of needles/sharps generated in a home health care setting.

■ **The Partnership Assisted Rating Development System (PARDS) Team at the St. Petersburg, Fla., VA Regional Office** – for partnering with local veterans service organizations and county service officers to dramatically reduce the amount of time required to process a disability claim for veterans and dependents from

months to weeks, thereby improving customer satisfaction and reducing the number of claims decisions that were appealed.

■ **Service Transition Examination Program (STEP) Project Team in Nashville, Tenn.** – for developing a collaborative effort between VHA, VBA and Department of Defense personnel to receive and promptly process applications for service-connected disabilities and perform physical examinations for military personnel.

■ **Service Quality Improvement Team at the Philadelphia VA Regional Office & Insurance Center** – for partnering with the Social Security Administration to improve service quality to veterans while saving taxpayers more than a million dollars.

■ **Enhanced-Use Energy Team in Mountain Home, Tenn.** – for developing an innovative project that provides tangible energy and capital cost savings.

■ **Lebanon, Pa., VA Medical Center and YMCA Partnership Team** – for developing and implementing a lease agreement to improve services to VA patients.

■ **Bar Code Medication Administration Project Team at VA Central Office** – for automating the manual process of administering medications to inpatients at VA medical centers, which improved patient care and safety, and reduced costs.

■ **Vancouver Enhanced-Use Team at Portland, Ore., VA Medical Center** – for partnering with several local government and community agencies to provide safe housing for homeless veterans.

At the VACO Hammer Award ceremony, the CAPRI Project Team also received a VA Scissors Award for their initiative. These awards were created by former Acting Secretary Hershel Gober in 1995 to be a complement to the national Hammer Awards. More than 350 Scissors Awards were presented to VA employees for their efforts to cut red tape, streamline operations, improve veterans' services and empower employees. □

# New VA Home Page Feature Simplifies Searches

Basil White, of VA's Office of Information & Technology in headquarters, said it became an unbearable distraction to his sense of timeliness to have to go back to the main VA home page every time a search for information was unfulfilled. He responded by developing the VA HyperFAQ to simplify VA Web searches for veterans and employees.

The VA HyperFAQ (hypertext-based frequently asked questions index) is an interface available to users of VA's home page at [www.va.gov/hyperFAQ](http://www.va.gov/hyperFAQ), designed to minimize the information and decision-making required for a user to locate Web sites with the specific information they seek.

"There are endless Web sites connected to the VA home page," said White, who developed the HyperFAQ with assistance from the CIO Field Office in Silver Spring, Md. "On any Web site like VA's, with seemingly endless links, there is a need to reduce the steps and time it takes to get where you want to be."

White said the HyperFAQ distills the top 200 hits, or Web sites, on

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) into a set of simple yes-no questions that generate a small, manageable list of Web sites.

"The HyperFAQ is based on research in cognitive psychology and technical communication on how to build alternate navigation systems for users who cannot locate the information they need from the primary design of the site or by using a search engine," White said. "By using a binary, or 'yes-no' question scheme, the HyperFAQ minimizes the information and decision-making required to locate Web sites."

Here's an example of how HyperFAQ works. Let's say a user is trying to find information about a VA benefit, like home loans, and they can't find the information they want using the main VA page.

Using the HyperFAQ, they'd answer "yes" to the question "I'm looking for information on how to receive a benefit." The user would then answer "no" to "I want a health care benefit," "I'm looking for general information on VA benefits," and "I'm looking for information on homeless veterans, minority veter-

ans, seniors, or women veterans."

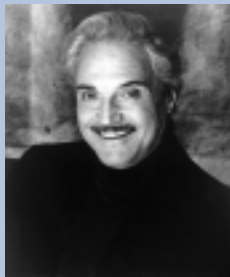
The HyperFAQ would then present a brief list of Web sites, one of which is the Loan Guaranty home page at [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov). Users do not have to answer the questions in the same way to find information on the same topic, because many sites are linked from multiple branches on the HyperFAQ.

White said the HyperFAQ also is useful for determining new ways to relate VA Web sites to each other. He said designers who want to promote a new site could respond to the HyperFAQ questions as if they were a potential customer of the new site, then contact the designers of the site on the results page to link their sites to one another.

This procedure allows users to find parallel relationships among disparate Web sites that would normally require the user to return to the VA home page or another high-level index and begin selecting sub-pages all over again.

For more information on HyperFAQ, contact Basil White at (202) 273-8029 or by e-mail at [basil.white@mail.va.gov](mailto:basil.white@mail.va.gov). □

## Actor Hal Linden Serves as 2001 Salute Chairman



Linden

12<sup>th</sup> Precinct. Now actor, singer and musician Hal Linden is sharing his talents with VA, serving as chairman of the 2001 National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.

As Salute chairman, the Emmy and Tony Award-winning actor will invite the public to visit and honor hospitalized veterans across the country during the week of Feb. 11-17. He'll also serve as

He's probably best known as TV's Barney Miller, the beleaguered police captain who headed New York City's

national spokesperson for the nearly 105,000 volunteers who assist veterans in VA facilities throughout the year.

The native New Yorker began his show business career as a clarinet player and later toured as a singer with several bands. As a member of the U.S. Army Band, he got involved in revues, which piqued his interest in acting.

After his discharge from the military, Linden enrolled at New York's American Theatre Wing and spent the next six years honing his craft. He got his first big break in 1958, when he was signed as an understudy in the Broadway production of "Bells Are Ringing." Within five days, he had the lead role. Linden's performance in the musical "The Rothchilds" landed him a Tony award and the starring role in the

"Barney Miller" television series.

After "Barney Miller," he appeared in numerous television movies and specials before starring in another series, "Blackie's Magic." In recent years, he's appeared in Broadway and touring company productions, starred in two other TV series, and played Mozart on clarinet with the Dallas Symphony.

Linden isn't the only celebrity touting the National Salute. For the 13<sup>th</sup> straight year, newspaper columnist Ann Landers has asked her readers to send Valentine's cards and letters to veterans hospitalized in VA medical centers nationwide. Since the National Salute's inception in March 1978, thousands of schoolchildren, individuals and organizations have adopted the program as a public service project. □

# Alabama VA Employees Help Tornado Victims



Jackie McCullough, right, a social worker at the Birmingham, Ala., VA Medical Center, confers with a recovery volunteer at the Hillcrest Meadows subdivision in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

**D**ecember 16 was an unusually warm Saturday in Tuscaloosa and neighboring parts of Alabama, residents recalled. Many were busy decorating and shopping for the upcoming holiday season. And then disaster struck. A line of powerful tornadoes tore through the region, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Twelve people were killed and 75 were injured in the storms.

Hardest hit was the Tuscaloosa area, where a tornado rated F-4 on the five-level Fujita scale struck. The deadly twister passed less than a mile from the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. Employees from that facility and the Birmingham VA Medical Center quickly joined the effort to help victims.

Members of the VISN 7 (Atlanta) Emergency Medical Response Team (EMRT) represented the first federal agency response to the horrific scene left by the storm. The EMRT's mental health providers are trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), and most are certified by the Red Cross in disaster mental health services. In the aftermath of disasters, the EMRT mental health providers provide psychological support and assistance to the victims.

When they arrived at the Hillcrest Meadows subdivision, the VA EMRT members found survivors struggling

support to the victims and informed them of the resources available to them.

Martin, a VISN 7 EMRT member since 1998, said the CISM training the team members had was invaluable, providing them with the technical knowledge and experience needed to offer meaningful assistance to the victims. He said the scene at the Hillcrest Meadows subdivision was like "a war zone that had been cluster-bombed. All of the homes were damaged and most were completely destroyed by the tornado."

Two days after the storm, Martin went to the Bear Creek Mobile Home Park, where half of those killed by the storms had lived. He was shocked by the destruction he saw. "Cars were upside down on top of each other," Martin reported. "Steel trailer frames were wrapped around trees like pretzels." He met with survivors throughout the day, offering crisis counseling and providing resources for food and shelter.

Other VISN 7 EMRT members

who helped victims in the days after the disaster included Birmingham VAMC social worker Jackie McCullough, Tuscaloosa VAMC physician Steve Groff, researcher Rosemary Tigano and Tuscaloosa VAMC Chaplain Richard Adams. Tuscaloosa VAMC Chief Operating Officer John Goldman was at the site providing VA resources and personnel as needed. The EMRT members received high praise from Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), who met with them during a staging meeting on December 19.

A number of VA nurses also responded to calls to provide medical assistance at the disaster site. And Montgomery, Ala., VA Regional Office Loan Guaranty staff partnered with the local Disabled American Veterans chapter to prepare and distribute VA benefits information packages to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Relief Centers in the hardest-hit areas. Steve Langford, an appraiser on the staff and FEMA liaison, coordinated efforts to ensure the packages were in place when the centers opened.



A view of the devastation at the Bear Creek Mobile Home Park.

The Montgomery VARO staff also worked with the St. Petersburg, Fla., VA Regional Loan Center to issue an information bulletin to lenders doing business in Alabama. The bulletin requested forbearance on any veteran's defaulted loan that may have occurred as a result of the storms. □

# Four Salisbury VAMC Employees Honored for Valor

Former Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober visited the Salisbury, N.C., VA Medical Center on October 30 to present the Secretary's Award for Valor to four employees who displayed heroism during a shooting incident last summer involving a patient.

On August 3, an 83-year-old man was brought to the facility while in the custody of a sheriff's deputy. As emergency room physician Dr. Charles L. Flynn tried to examine the man, he pulled out a handgun and shot Flynn in the chest.

When VA police officers Steven Chandler and Timothy Nason entered the room, the patient fired at them, and they were forced to return fire. The officers had only recently begun carrying firearms under a national plan to arm all VA police officers. Carol B. Currier, a registered nurse, pulled Flynn to safety after the shooting and immediately began providing medical care. □



*Dr. Charles L. Flynn, an emergency room physician at the Salisbury, N.C., VA Medical Center, is interviewed by local reporters after receiving the Secretary's Award for Valor in recognition of his effort to prevent injury to other patients and employees by attempting to take a handgun away from an elderly patient.*



*Former Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober (far right) presented the Secretary's Award for Valor to VA police officers Steven Chandler (second from right) and Timothy Nason (second from left) on October 3. The officers risked their lives in the line of duty during the August 3 shooting at the Salisbury, N.C., VA Medical Center. VA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security and Law Enforcement John H. Baffa is at far left.*



*Carol B. Currier talks with Dr. Charles L. Flynn as others look on following the Secretary's Award for Valor ceremony at the Salisbury, N.C., VA Medical Center. Currier, a registered nurse, pulled Flynn to safety after he was shot while attempting to take a handgun away from a patient.*

## Organ Donation— Giving the Gift of Life

"You know, organ recipients are like lottery winners," explained Bob Volck, a VA Central Office (VACO) computer specialist, as he stood in front of the Organ Donor Awareness Quilt on display recently in the VACO Canteen. "They're just so lucky a family made the decision to donate a loved one's organ." In his case, that family saved his life.

Volck's name sat on the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) national waiting list for more than a year. As his health slowly deteriorated, his name moved

higher and higher on the list, until finally reaching the top. That was December 1997, the year he received a new liver. "I was lucky," admitted Volck. "Many people are so weak by the time they reach the top of the list that they are in no shape for surgery—that's the sad irony of this whole process." Today, there are more than 73,000 people on the UNOS waiting list, including some 400 veterans.

"Transplantation saves lives," declared Patrycya Lloyd, a VACO program analyst. "And in my case, it gave me back my life." Ever since her kidneys failed, Lloyd was forced to schedule her life around dialysis treatments needed to filter waste products from her

*(continued on page 16)*

## Organ Donation (cont.)



Jane Hawkins (right), a management assistant in VA Central Office, leafs through a binder that describes the significance of each patch on the Organ Donor Awareness Quilt, while Patrycya Lloyd, a program analyst, and Bob Volck, a computer specialist, look on.

blood. "You absolutely must keep every appointment," she said. "You have to be extremely careful about your food and fluid intake. Plus, your energy levels are greatly diminished; dialysis affects every aspect of your life."

But all those restrictions were wiped away when her sister offered her one of her kidneys. "Now, I'm free to do the things I want in life, and I can't stress enough what that freedom means to me," Lloyd said.

According to the Department of Health and Human Service's Organ Donor Web site, [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov), about 60 people receive organ transplants each day. But sadly, 16 still die daily, simply because there are not enough organs available.

Volunteers travel in their communities with the Organ Donor Awareness Quilt to highlight the importance of organ donation. The quilt consists of 12 independent sections, each composed of individual patches made by families who have donated a loved one's organ.

National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week is fast approaching (April 16-22). It's a good time to consider whether you'd like to become an organ donor.

In the end, your decision could save a life. "It's not enough to check the organ donor box on your driver's license," Lloyd pointed out.

"You really have to talk to your family to ensure that your request is honored." □

## Historic Dayton VAMC Adds Virtual Museum to Web Site

The Dayton, Ohio, VA Medical Center has added a unique feature to its Web site on the Internet—a virtual museum that educates visitors about the rich history of the facility. The Dayton campus was established in 1867 as the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS), Central Branch. It was one of the original three National Homes established by Abraham Lincoln in 1865 to offer housing and job skills training for Civil War veterans.

The virtual museum allows visitors to find out what life was like on the campus on a typical day in June 1885 by taking an electronic "tour" of the grounds and gardens. A virtual exhibit gallery and statistics provide additional perspective.

The NHDVS, Central Branch was a large facility even by today's standards. Home Hospital, which opened in 1870, was expanded several times, and eventually had 840 inpatient beds. At the time, it was considered the best-constructed hospital in the country. At its peak in 1897, more than 5,000 veterans were receiving various types of care at the facility. In addition to the hospital, the Central Branch offered numerous workshops, operated a large farm and dairy, and was a leader in medical education.

Today, six of the original structures dating from 1868 to 1875 are still standing. VA, along with the American Veterans Heritage Center (AVHC) and the Dayton community, have committed to restoring four of the historic buildings—the Patient Library, the Headquarters Building, the Barracks Building and the Home Chapel. The Chapel, built by veterans with limestone they quarried on the grounds, was the first permanent place of worship ever constructed by the U.S. government.

The AVHC plans to allow the buildings to serve their original purposes when possible, and to preserve the buildings for future use as museums, educational centers and conference facilities. To take the virtual tour, go to [www.daytonvamc.com](http://www.daytonvamc.com) and click on "Historic Tour." □

## Holiday Cheer for Homeless Vets



VA Central Office employees responded overwhelmingly to a request by VA's Homeless Veterans Programs Office to make some holiday wishes come true for homeless veterans at the Sarah McClendon House, a transitional housing and assistance facility in Washington, D.C. At left, Al Taylor, program specialist in the office, and Ruth Mahnken, program analyst, prepare to deliver the donated gifts and warm clothing to the residents a few days before Christmas.





## VA Study Shows Acupuncture Benefits Chemotherapy Patients

Electroacupuncture helped reduce vomiting among cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, reports a VA-led study published in the December 6, 2000 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The study divided 104 women with breast cancer—all of whom were using the same chemotherapy drugs that often cause nausea and vomiting—into three groups. One group received the electroacupuncture treatment, another received a mock-electroacupuncture placebo, and the third group was not treated. Following the treatments, the women in the electroacupuncture group experienced a median of five vomiting episodes over five days. Those receiving the mock treatment had a median of 10 vomiting episodes and the non-electroacupuncture patients had a median of 15 episodes during the same period.

Lead author Dr. Paul Shekelle, of the Greater Los Angeles VA Health Care System and the RAND Health Program, noted that the mock-electroacupuncture group had fewer vomiting episodes than the non-electroacupuncture group. This fact, he said, points to the value of the extra interaction that occurred in the mock-electroacupuncture sessions, and supports the role for behavioral interventions along with drug therapy for cancer patients.

Scientists from VA, the National Institutes of Health, the University of California at Los Angeles and RAND, plus a doctor of Oriental medicine, conducted the study. The findings effectively answer critics who suggested earlier studies showing the beneficial effects of acupuncture in reducing nausea from chemotherapy were caused by a placebo effect, and previously had not been considered reliable.

## Boston Research Links Heavy Meals to Heart Attacks

We know gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins, but can it also trigger a deadly medical complication such as a heart attack? A new study conducted by researchers from the VA Boston Health Care System (HCS) in Brockton, Mass., and announced at the American Heart Association's 73rd Scientific Sessions, suggests so.

The study found people at risk for heart disease were four times more likely than others to suffer a myocardial infarction soon after eating a big meal. "To our knowledge, this study is the first to show overeating or having a heavy meal is a risk factor for triggering heart attacks," said Dr. Francisco Lopez-Jimenez, a VA Boston HCS cardiology fellow and staffer at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

For the study, Lopez-Jimenez and colleagues interviewed nearly 2,000 patients at 45 different hospitals shortly after their heart attacks and asked about possible triggers, including "unusually heavy meals." They found that 158 patients reported

having an unusually heavy meal within 26 hours prior to their heart attack, while 25 patients said they had their big meal just two hours before the attack.

The researchers believe there are two possible explanations for how a heavy meal could bring on a heart attack. First, fatty meals may affect the function of the endothelium, the inner layer of the arteries. Second, eating increases the level of norepinephrine, a hormone that raises blood pressure and pulse rate.

Lopez-Jimenez stressed that triggers for heart disease are different from risk factors, such as obesity, hypertension, smoking and lack of exercise. "Overeating should be considered as a heart attack trigger, much in the same way as extreme physical activities and severe anger episodes," he said. He advises people at risk for a heart attack to watch the size of their meals as well as the total caloric intake. Cardiovascular disease is the nation's number one killer, with some 1.1 million people suffering an acute myocardial infarction each year.

## Is Mammography Screening Necessary for Younger Women with a Family History of Breast Cancer?

Most breast cancer screening guidelines advise women with a mother, sister or daughter who has been diagnosed with the disease to begin mammography screenings at an earlier age. But a new study conducted by researchers at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) suggests the benefits of mammography testing for women younger than 50 may not outweigh the potential harm.

Researchers analyzed data collected from mammography tests of 389,000 women and found the procedure missed a similar percentage of cancers regardless of family history.

"People have thought that because women with a family history are at higher risk than women of a similar age without a family history, maybe mammography would perform better in these women," said Karla Kerlikowske, M.D., chief of the Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center at the San Francisco VAMC and an assistant professor at UCSF. "But there is no data to support that hypothesis. The sensitivity of mammography is primarily influenced by the age of the woman, and is not affected by family history."

Mammography screening can induce anxiety and fear in women, plus the very real threat of what's commonly referred to as a false-positive test result—a positive result for breast cancer that is actually a false alarm. The study found that women with a family history of breast cancer had an increased likelihood of a false-positive test result, so testing these women at an earlier age may do them more harm than good.

Kerlikowske hopes this study will convince doctors to consider their decisions a little more carefully before automatically recommending a mammography screening for younger women with a family history of breast cancer, and to advise these women of both the benefits and potential harms.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women, behind skin cancer, and it is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, after lung cancer. About 77 percent of women with breast cancer are over age 50 at the time of diagnosis. □



The prestigious New England Journal of Medicine called **VA's health care system** "a laudable success" in an editorial appearing in the January 2001 edition. "There have been many forces operating to promote the success of VA's efforts at quality improvement, including strong, effective leadership and an experienced, dedicated work force," stated the editorial. "In most cases in which comparable statistics from the private sector exist, the performance of VA appears to be superior." The editorial noted that VA is providing care at more sites to more veterans with fewer employees than five years ago, while becoming an industry leader in such areas as patient safety, the computerization of patient records, preventative screenings and immunizations.

A former Marine who served in World War II became the first veteran buried in the **Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery** on November 10, 2000, the 225th anniversary of the establishment of the U.S. Marine Corps. Construction of the cemetery is being funded by VA's State Cemetery Grants Program, which has helped establish or improve 43 state veterans' cemeteries. The cemetery's first phase of construction includes an administration building, a maintenance facility, and nearly 2,000 burial sites.

Thanks to an initiative led by **Keith J. Thompson**, director of the **Hartford**,

**Conn., VA Regional Office**, the city of Hartford kicked off its first ever "Veterans Appreciation Week" as part of the state's Veterans Day observances. To mark the occasion, the regional office's lobby was decorated with celebratory banners and flags, and veterans received small gifts and refreshments in appreciation of their service. The festivities were also extended to veterans working in the regional office and local veterans service organizations. They received framed certificates of appreciation, and a letter from Senators Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.) and Joseph I. Lieberman (D-Conn.) during a ceremony held in their honor.

The year 2001 brought a new twist to traditional staff meetings for some 800 nursing staff at the **Houston VA Medical Center** and its surrounding community-based outpatient clinics. In the past, the monthly clinical forums were held during different nursing shifts so all could attend. But even then, the meetings were hampered by poor attendance, as nurses were unable to leave patients under their care. To tackle the problem, **Deloris W. Leftridge**, the chief nurse executive, decided to use digital video communication to allow nurses to view the forum from the convenience of a computer at their work sites.

As part of the Quarterly Memorial Service at the **Columbia, Mo., VA Medical Center**, condolence letters are sent to the next of kin of deceased veterans who were

treated at the facility within the two years prior to their passing. With the letter is a booklet on grief and how to cope with the loss of a loved one, plus contact numbers for a veterans service officer and the facility chaplain. Then, each quarter, a memorial service is held in the medical center chapel to honor the veteran's memory and help bring closure for family, friends and employees. **Laura DeVenney**, a registered nurse at the medical center, developed the idea for the Quarterly Memorial Service.

The Chief of Montaukett Indians and members of the Shinnecock Tribe honored Native American veterans during the **Northport, N.Y., VA Medical Center's** first Native American program, sponsored by the facility's EEO Native American Special Emphasis Committee. Those attending enjoyed a cup of traditional corn chowder while viewing Native American images and artifacts.

The **Leavenworth, Kan., VA National Cemetery** recently completed a \$3.1 million gravesite expansion project to add 6,500 double-depth lawn crypts, allowing the cemetery to remain open until 2012. The cemetery was established in 1886 and maintains some 25,000 gravesites.

The **Cleveland, Ohio, VA Regional Office** teamed with several federal and local employment agencies to sponsor five "Veterans Mean Business" workshops held throughout the state. The workshops focused on connecting veterans with representatives of self-employment organizations in their areas, while providing training on a variety of topics related to self-employment. More than 400 veterans

turned out at the events to learn about business record keeping, writing a business plan, marketing, use of the Internet to sell products and services, and various issues relating to financing.

Veterans at the **Salisbury, N.C., VA Medical Center** receive lunch trays garnished with snack cakes and candles on their birthday as part of a "birthday greeting" program initiated by the medical center's patient advocates. After lunch, the patient advocates visit veterans' rooms to present a birthday card signed by the medical center director and a gift from Voluntary Service. Staff members report veterans are very grateful that someone remembers their birthday.

The **New Mexico VA Health Care System**, the **Albuquerque VA Regional Office** and the **Albuquerque Vet Center** teamed with approximately 30 local, state and federal agencies to provide assistance to 830 members of Albuquerque's homeless and near-homeless population during Project Hand-Up VII. The two-day event—where attendees receive meals, health screenings, clean clothing, showers, haircuts and other necessities—drew about 200 veterans.

More than 300 veterans, community members and employees of the **Richmond, Va., VA Medical Center** turned out for the 6th annual Walk for Awareness to draw attention to breast cancer while honoring the memory of those who have lost their lives to the disease. The event, held on the facility grounds, began with a donation from veterans and staff to the Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation. □

# HONORS



and awards

## New Orleans VA Medical Center Director John D. Church, Jr.,



Church

received the 2000 L.R. Jordan Leadership Achievement Award, the highest honor given by the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB), where he received his graduate degree in Health Administration. Church, a 1975 UAB graduate, has dedicated himself to guiding and counseling other graduates whose collective career experiences now span a decade. "The Department is truly fortunate to have individuals of his caliber who are so dedicated to the development of the future generation of health care leaders," said John E. Sheridan, interim chair, Department of Health Services Administration, UAB.

Two VA health care systems and their respective employee unions were among nine federal agencies honored by President Clinton's National Partnership Council for forging strong labor-management partnerships vital to improving productivity and enhancing operations. The **Palo Alto, Calif., VA Health Care System** and **AFGE Locals 2110 and 1620**, along with the **South Texas Veterans Health Care System** and **AFGE Locals 2281, 3511 and 4032**, received honorable mention citations in the John N.

Sturdivant National Partnership Award program. The award was created in 1995 to recognize executive branch agencies that have improved labor-management partnerships and increased union involvement in agency decision-making.

## Alan VanBiervliet, Ph.D.,

a computer systems analyst, and his team at the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** in Little Rock, Ark., won an International Communications Film & Video Competition Award for the Year 2000. They won the Silver Plaque award in the Interactive Multimedia—Education Division. The team was recognized for developing a CD-ROM program designed to help agencies meet the federal mandate to consider assistive technology when developing educational programs for children with disabilities.

**Pat V. Caralis, M.D.**, chief of General Medicine at the **Miami VA Medical Center** and professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Miami School of Medicine, received the Laureate Award at the American College of Physicians—American Society of Internal Medicine Florida Chapter's Scientific meeting. The award honors members who have demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence in patient care, education, or research and in service to their community and the College. In 1978, Caralis was appointed as the Department of Medicine's first female chief resident. She

later helped establish the medical center's Women Veterans Health Program.

The State of Maryland honored **Linda Michaelson**, Telecommunications manager at the **Perry Point, Md., VA Medical Center**, during National Disability Employment Awareness Month for her efforts in hiring people with disabilities. She was cited in the "Year 2000 Employer Award" program for steadily recruiting job-ready applicants from the state's Division of Rehabilitation Services.

The National Security Agency (NSA) selected **Philip Tropea**, of the **Philadelphia Benefits Delivery Center**, as one of three finalists for the Rowlett Information Systems Security Award for Individual Achievement. As a team leader for Internet Integration, the computer specialist provides critical support to all

VBA Internet and Intranet systems. His team was involved in designing and implementing VBA's Internet gateway, and continues to ensure network security throughout VA. He was the only non-Department of Defense nominee selected for the NSA award.

Two **Philadelphia VA Medical Center** nurses were honored with the prestigious Nightingale Awards of Pennsylvania. Nurse practitioner **Nancy Weidemer** was honored for her work in chronic pain management, as well as her volunteer efforts on behalf of the homeless. Nurse researcher **Helene Moriarty** was honored for her research on families experiencing severe stressors, psychiatric mental health nursing and clinical nursing, and her role in mentoring nurses in the research and publication process. □

## VA Employee Inducted Into Wheelchair Sports Hall of Fame

**Tom Brown**, chief of Recreation Therapy Service at the **South Texas Veterans Health Care System**, is a legend in the track and field arena. He's held the national one-mile record, the 60- and 100-yard dash records, and he proudly holds five gold and 14 silver medals from the 1969 and 1971 Pan-American games. And he accomplished it all from a wheelchair.

For his unparalleled list of sporting achievements, Brown has been inducted into the Wheelchair Sports USA Hall of Fame. "Wheelchair basketball and other sports have been the major rehabilitation factors in my life," he said. "I want all disabled people in the VA



Brown

to be exposed to sports as an aspect of rehabilitation—to at least have a chance." Brown co-founded the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 1981 and has served as the event's national director since 1985.



While dining with a friend, Pharmacy intern **Gregory Pellegrini**, of the **Central California Health Care System**, heard sounds of someone choking at the table behind him. He quickly stood up, approached the choking victim and asked if the man could talk. When he shook his head no, Pellegrini asked him to stand. He then administered the Heimlich maneuver, dislodging a piece of steak on the third attempt. Later, he talked with the man and discovered he was a former VA facility director who was at the restaurant with his wife celebrating their 42nd wedding anniversary. Pellegrini's actions possibly prevented a tragedy from occurring during the couple's special occasion. Several days later, the former director stopped by the VA facility to personally thank Pellegrini and tell the current director of the Pharmacy intern's heroic deed.

☆☆☆☆☆

**Matthew Francis**, an employee at the **Columbus, Ohio, VA Outpatient Clinic**, was driving to one of the clinic's Field Service Centers when the car in front of him lost control and slammed into a telephone pole. He immediately pulled to the side of the road to offer assistance. The driver of the car was frantically pulling her children, ages 11, 8, 5 and 15 months, out of the wrecked vehicle. When Francis realized the 11-year-old was unconscious and appeared to have a severe head wound, he pulled out his cell phone and called 911. He

then administered first aid to the child until paramedics arrived. The critically injured child was airlifted to Children's Hospital in Columbus.

☆☆☆☆☆

A crisis erupted on a cold January morning at the **Atlanta VA Regional Office** when a veteran walked into the lobby with a loaded shotgun, stuck the weapon under his chin, and threatened to pull the trigger if he didn't get to talk with a VA counselor. Security guard **Grady Gipson**, of Millennium Security, kept the man calm while his partner **Carlos Alston** evacuated veterans and employees from the lobby. Shortly after the lobby was cleared, agents **Danny Penton**, **Rick Prewitt** and **Kim Ward**, of the Atlanta Office of the Inspector General, began negotiating with the veteran. They continued until VA Police, DeKalb County Police and Atlanta VAMC physician assistant **John Stein**, arrived. The two-hour confrontation ended peacefully when the veteran handed over his weapon.

☆☆☆☆☆

**Dr. Peter Engel**, a geriatrician at the **Albany, N.Y., VA Medical Center**, was in the Denver airport returning home from a meeting when he came to the aid of a fellow traveler who appeared to be suffering cardiac arrest. Assisted by another traveler, Engel performed CPR on the victim. The man had regained his

pulse and was responsive by the time paramedics arrived.

☆☆☆☆☆

It began as a normal day for **Gregory Potts**, the acting chief of Police and Security at the **Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System**. While driving to work, he stopped to pick up **Brazil Shell**, a medical clerk who regularly carools with him. As he reached her house, he noticed smoke seeping from a house across the street. He jumped out of

his car, raced across the street, and began pounding on the burning house's front door. When no one came to the door, he asked Shell to call the fire and police departments. Suddenly, a man burst out the front door with his pajamas in flames. Potts and Shell put out the flames and wrapped the man in a blanket. As they were moving him to safety, emergency crews arrived to battle the blaze. It was later discovered that another person was in the house and succumbed to smoke inhalation. □

## LETTERS

I was distressed to read the comments of Mr. Paul Sherbo in the November VAnguard [page 3] that claimed that federal employee unions oppose veterans' preference. As president of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) National VA Council (NVAC), I can safely say nothing could be further from the truth.

Among the enduring themes of the NVAC are "Carrying the Torch for America's Veterans" and "Veterans Serving Veterans." Thousands of our members are veterans themselves. At our AFGE NVAC conventions, veterans are always recognized in special ceremonies and dedications. Many of the members on the NVAC have served in active duty. It would not be reasonable for us as a union to support a policy which not only goes against the very reason the VA exists, but would be contrary to the interests of a majority of our members.

With regard to the specific accusation Mr. Sherbo makes, I note the AFGE testimony in March 1998, when an AFGE National Vice President stated, "AFGE yields to no one in its admiration and gratitude for the service of our nation's veterans...AFGE is solidly pro-veteran." Testimony was offered not to reduce veterans' preference, but to give protection in hiring and RIFs for veterans and employees.

The Army Times article that Mr. Sherbo quotes does not provide any specific information about the bill submitted by Congressman Lane Evans, but rather makes a general statement that federal employee unions do not support veterans' preference...I appreciate being able to set the record straight and correct this black mark against the thousands of hard-working employees and veteran employees this Council represents.

**Alma L. Lee**  
VA Medical Center  
Salem, Va.