



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

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**Rolling in Times Square — page 8**

**Inside:** 'Day of Honor', 4 ☆ Presidential Quality Award, 6 ☆ POW/MIA Flag, 11

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## COLUMNS 13-16

### On the cover:

Times Square was the setting for a lively basketball game during the 21st National Veterans Wheelchair Games, held July 1-5. The exhibition, which attracted a crowd that included curious tourists, was a highlight of the week. The Games were hosted by the Bronx VAMC and Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association.

### Vanguard

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# INTRODUCING

Herb Champion

Through their daily interactions with veterans, volunteers play a vital role in VA medical facilities. Most employees understand and appreciate their tireless efforts in helping VA provide the best possible service. But do volunteers, themselves, realize just how much veterans appreciate their service?

Herb Champion, an accounting technician and purchase card coordinator at the Tuscaloosa, Ala., VA Medical Center, wants volunteers to know just how important they are to hospitalized veterans. When colleagues asked him to write a song about volunteers and sing it during the medical center's Volunteer Recognition Ceremony, he jumped at the opportunity. "Volunteers are real important," said Champion, "but sometimes I don't think they realize how much veterans appreciate them."

In his first position with VA, as a ward clerk on the Nursing Home unit, he came to realize the impact volunteers had on veterans' lives. "You could just see it in their eyes," said the retired Navy veteran. "They were longing to talk with someone from the outside, someone who wasn't a resident in the nursing home." He soon began volunteering and would frequently bring his guitar and play a few songs for the nursing home residents.

As word of his musical talent spread, colleagues began asking him to sing the national anthem or other patriotic songs at annual ceremonies and special events. That's when Randy LeSturgeon, coordinator of Volunteer Programs, and Doug

Taylor, director of Customer Service, had the idea of asking him to write a song about volunteers and sing it at the annual Volunteer Recognition Ceremony. "We thought, Herb writes songs, he's a great singer and a volunteer, why not ask him to write a song about what it means to be a volunteer," LeSturgeon recalled.

Champion wrote the song, titled "Personally, to the Volunteer," and put the lyrics to music he had

previously recorded. His surprise performance during the ceremony brought the audience of volunteers, employees and family members to their feet, and according to LeSturgeon, brought tears to the eyes of many. "It wasn't just the song itself, but the emotion behind it," he said. "It was a night they'll be talking about for a long time."

The following two verses reveal some of the emotion Champion shared that night:

*"... If you didn't care, and never came,  
You would probably never know  
What it means to have you here with me,  
And how you make my spirit grow*

*Personally, I think of you  
Several times a day.  
Personally, being there with you  
Means more than I can say ..."*

While he was singing, Champion said he was able to look into the eyes of the volunteers in the audience and see they were touched by his lyrics, adding, "I got a little choked up myself." ▣

By Matt Bristol



Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite,  
Under Secretary  
for Health

## VHA's 'QUEST' Initiative Underway



The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has made an incredible journey over the last six years. Working together, we've transformed

our health care system and the way we do business, and we've received notice and recognition for it. In this relatively brief time, VHA has measured and improved health care services and succeeded in increasing patient satisfaction by focusing on patients and on quality.

In American health care, our performance measurement system is recognized as leading the industry. Our clinical care quality measurement system and the results we have achieved are being used as a case study by a leading institute for training clinical leaders of major U.S. health care organizations.

While this transformation was taking place, VA's health care system became an industry leader in such areas as patient safety, surgical quality assessment, the computerization of medical records, telemedicine and preventive screenings.

In research, in medical education and in the delivery of health care, VHA has made remarkable advances. I'm very proud of this, and I'm proud of VHA employees whose contributions make it happen.

It's great to be recognized for the hard work and difficult choices necessary for the changes we have made. Improved access and quality have made VHA an attractive health care choice for America's heroes, our veterans. But VHA is not yet as good as we can be. We must capitalize on our achievements and reach the next levels of high performance. Health care—the industry and the practice—is not standing still. VHA is in a position to lead the way.

We've set ambitious goals and objectives through a strategy called "6 for 2006," a framework for measuring our progress. I want these goals to touch every corner, every member of our organization and all of our stakeholders. They are:

- put quality first until first in quality;
- provide easy access to medical knowledge, expertise and care;
- enhance, preserve and restore patient function;
- exceed patients' expectations;
- maximize resource use to benefit veterans; and
- build healthy communities.

Now VHA has set its sights on capturing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, an initiative it will export throughout the system as the "QUEST."

The Baldrige Award, named for the former Secretary of Commerce, is universally recognized as the gold standard of performance excellence. Since it was established in 1988, 41 organizations have received the award. VHA will attempt to become a member of this elite group. We've already begun assessing the system by applying the Baldrige criteria, and determining how we measure up as stewards of the resources, system and mission with which we've been entrusted.

Every high-performing organization can measure and improve in the seven categories that make up the Baldrige system. The categories are: leadership, strategic planning, patient focus, information and analysis, human resource focus, process management and business results. Approximately 115 questions ask the organization to assess "how" it performs the functions in each area and what the measured results are.

The first time an organization does a self-assessment can be quite a challenge because there often are not good measures of the processes. A major value of the self-assessment is in precisely describing and learning

how to measure the ways the organization does its business. Results of the self-assessment are the basis of focused improvements.

VHA has had programs based on the Malcolm Baldrige model for 10 years. In his former role as Deputy Secretary of VA, current Secretary Anthony Principi initiated the Robert W. Carey Quality Award program. VHA, as well as the Veterans Benefits and National Cemetery Administrations, have used this program to recognize organizational elements that have achieved significant performance gains.

While winning the Baldrige Award would be wonderful, I'm not passionate about attaining it. I *am* passionate about the process, however—the questions it asks, and the self-assessment it requires. It's an intense self-examination of who we are, where we are going, and what we hope to achieve. Along the way, we will find tangible examples of things we can do better. It's an excellent way to learn about ourselves, and improve the way we deliver care to veterans.

Better tools, better education, better methods, better management of our resources, better performance, better results—that's what Baldrige can do for us. Make us better. And that excites me. I believe as VHA employees begin to feel the impact of Baldrige and what it can do for you in the workplace, you'll be as excited as I am. It's not just a way to improve the system, it's a way to improve the workplace for every employee. The Baldrige process emphasizes and places great value on employees.

The award will be great. But if we give it our all and don't win the Baldrige, we will know we have raised ourselves to the very highest standards of leadership, efficiency, quality, and performance. That makes us, and the veterans who depend on us, winners. And that, more than anything, is why we report to work each day. □



# 'Day of Honor' Brings Overdue Recognition



Marine Corporal Jake Nowakowski pins a red carnation on World War II veteran and Purple Heart recipient Rudolfo Reyes as he arrives at the Day of Honor ceremony.

It took nearly 60 years. Many minority veterans thought it would never happen. But it finally did when Congress unanimously passed a joint resolution last year supporting a "Day of Honor" to recognize minority veterans of World War II.

The resolution stated that the nation recognizes it "called upon all its citizens, including the most oppressed of its citizens, to provide service and sacrifice ... to defeat Nazism and fascism," and that "because of invidious discrimination, many of the courageous military activities of these minorities were not reported and honored fully and appropriately until decades after the Allied victory in World War II."

Though many minority veterans served with honor and distinction during World War II, their contributions went largely unrecognized. In fact, the heroic deeds of the Tuskegee Airmen, the Japanese American troops of the Army's "Go for Broke" regiment, and the Native American Code Talkers, among others, were often intentionally excluded from history textbooks.

On July 20, 700 Central New Yorkers packed the ballroom of the Convention Center in downtown Syracuse to salute their local minority veteran heroes with a Day of Honor dinner and recognition program. The audience was filled with local businessmen, union representatives, lawmakers, educators, medical professionals, religious

leaders and VA staff coming together to say a collective "thank you" to 88 minority veterans for their contributions to the Allied victory in World War II.

VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi and Congressman James T. Walsh (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for VA/HUD, were the keynote speakers.

In his remarks, Secretary Principi paid tribute to Central New York's minority veterans. "In spite of all the obstacles placed in their way," he said, "the roll call of accounts of heroism, of noble sacrifice, and uncommon valor among America's minority veterans who served in that fateful period, inspires our nation even half a century later. Your contribution was vital to our success."

Congressman Walsh tied the World War II minority veteran experience to the evolution of the Civil Rights Movement. "Our nation owes its minority World War II veterans a great debt, but not just for their active and heroic duty during the war," he said. "The example set by all minority veterans broke barriers that offered opportunity for advancement by our other civil rights leaders like Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

The event drew World War II heroes from across the region, like Jose C. Pagcaliwagan, a Filipino American who helped U.S. troops battle the Japanese in the Philippines as a Filipino Scout. He later joined the Navy and served in the Korean War.

Thomas Ichikawa, a Japanese American, was a member of the famed 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. With its battle cry, "Go For Broke!" the 442<sup>nd</sup>, along with the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, earned the distinction of being the most decorated unit of its size and length of service in battle in U.S. military history.

The unit played a significant role in liberating the Nazi concentration camps. Remarkably, while Ichikawa fought in Europe, his wife Kiyoko was confined in one of the Japanese internment camps back in the U.S.

Charles Latham and Freeman Finch were two of the African American veterans in attendance. Latham is a member of the famed Buffalo Soldiers, and later served in the South Pacific. Finch, a member of an all-black Army unit, was sent to Nagasaki soon after the atomic bomb was dropped.

Mexican American Rudolfo Reyes flew as a bombardier across Europe. Wounded three times, he is a Purple Heart recipient.



Matt Mulcahy, news anchor with the local CBS affiliate TV station, interviews veteran Thomas Ichikawa and wife Kiyoko.

Albert Tarbell, a Native American, served as an Army paratrooper. His World War II service took him from North Africa to Italy, and from England across to Germany. He was personally involved in liberating the concentration camps.

"The Day of Honor serves as a valuable history lesson," event coordinator Odie Freeman explained.

*(continued on page 11)*

# Long-Pending Benefit Claims to be Expedited

Resolving some 81,000 benefit claims that have been pending for more than a year is the focus of a national effort now being launched by VA. Veterans whose claims fall into this category and who are 70 years of age or older will have top priority in this initiative.

"There are too many cases of veterans over the age of 70 who are dying before their claims are evaluated," VA Secretary Anthony Principi explained. "These are veterans of World War II and Korea, and we have a responsibility to get them the benefits they deserve. I ask all VA employees to have a sense of urgency that this is an important mission."

VA estimates these veterans are dying at a rate of nearly 1,400 a day and have a typical life expectancy of less than 10 years. When a service-connected condition deteriorates later in life, veterans' claims may be reopened to determine if they are entitled to higher payments. Most of the pending workload of older veterans relates to these kinds of claims.

All VA regional offices are first being instructed to pull the benefit

applications of veterans age 70 or older that have been pending for more than a year, an estimated 6,000 applications. Over the next 18 months, a special unit being set up at the Cleveland VA Regional Office will first tackle that workload, then move on to another 17,000 claims of other veterans who have been waiting more than a year for a decision.

At the same time, the Veterans Benefits Administration will use its nine Service Delivery Network Resource Centers, designed to add claims processing capacity to each area of the country, to work on resolving another 58,000 long-pending claims. These applications often raise complex legal and medical issues.

Overall, VA has about 668,000 claims of all types awaiting an initial decision or on appeal. That includes an inventory of 355,000 VA regional office determinations on disability claims for service-connected compensation, a level considered double the acceptable amount in progress at any given time.

Cleveland VA Regional Office Director Phillip J. "Jack" Ross, who

has 29 years of experience both in VA field stations and headquarters, will spearhead the initiative there through a combination of existing staff and new hires. Ross is being given special authority to command quick turnarounds where needed in other VA offices, including medical centers. He'll report to Secretary Principi through Deputy Secretary Dr. Leo S. Mackay Jr.

The workload in Cleveland will be monitored to ensure that applications from Ohio veterans are not delayed. As other offices shift some claims of older veterans to Cleveland, they expect to be able to devote attention more quickly to the claims of other veterans. Even after the backlog of the long-pending claims of older veterans is reduced, VA will follow new rules to raise the priority of all applications of veterans who are age 70 or older.

More improvements to speed the decision processes affecting all veterans are expected to be considered after VA receives the report of the Claims Processing Task Force chartered by the Secretary in May to perform a top-to-bottom review of VA's benefit procedures. □

# VA Scores High in Veteran Satisfaction Survey

Results of a national survey of users of federal government programs showed veterans and their next of kin gave VA higher marks for customer service in most areas than federal agencies in general or the private sector. VA's strong showing in the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) came from survivors of veterans interred in national cemeteries, recipients of death claim benefits under VA life insurance policies, patients treated in VA medical centers, and outpatients who used VA pharmacy services.

The ACSI is a seven-year-old national economic indicator of customer satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available to American consumers through 164 companies. In 1999, it was adapted to add 30 federal agencies that deal with 90 percent of the government's public customers.

Produced through a partnership

between the University of Michigan Business School, the American Society for Quality and a management consulting firm, the index issues annual numerical rankings of companies, agencies and economic sectors on a 100-point scale based on more than 50,000 interviews with customers.

In the area of user trust, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) received a 96, "an incredibly high index" score, according to a summary of the report by the University of Michigan Business School. NCA achieved an overall customer service summary index of 93, one of the highest in government. It's 22 points above the ACSI score for all private sector services and 25 points above the federal government score. An ACSI score above 80 is considered very good.

The NCA survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2001 with 648

people who were veterans' next of kin or others who had arranged for interment in a VA national cemetery within six months to a year of the survey.

VA's life insurance program had an index of 90, also among the highest in government. This score far exceeds the best private insurance company index of 80 and the insurance industry average of 75.

The 2001 ACSI ranking VA achieved for acute medical services far exceeded private sector hospitals and other government service ratings. VA medical centers scored a satisfaction rating of 82 compared to the private sector's 71.2 and the federal government-wide score of 68.6. VA outpatient pharmacy services rated 83, a full 12 points higher than the comparable private sector rating of 71.2, and 14.4 points higher than the federal government-wide score of 68.6. □

# Grand Junction Wins Fed's Top Quality Award



Surrounded by some of the Grand Junction VAMC employees who accompanied him to Washington, Dr. Kurt Schlegelmilch holds the 2001 Presidential Award for Quality.

**T**he Grand Junction, Colo., VA Medical Center (VAMC) received the nation's top quality award for federal agencies, the 2001 Presidential Award for Quality. It is the first time in three years an organization has reached this level of recognition, and Grand Junction is the first VA facility to receive this honor—the government equivalent of the Malcolm Baldrige Award.

"This is the dream team of health care here in Grand Junction," said Dr. Kurt W. Schlegelmilch, director of the Grand Junction VAMC. "To stand up on that stage and receive this award on their behalf was the proudest moment of my professional career."

Employees from Grand Junction took center stage during the Excellence in Government Conference held last month in Washington, D.C., to receive the coveted award and describe the steps they took to become leaders in quality improvement. Their efforts led to more personalized service and a management structure responsive to the needs of veterans, employees and the community.

Perhaps one of Grand Junction's best-known achievements in patient care occurred in 1988, when employees developed the "virtual circle of

care" model. Under this approach, veterans receive all of their primary care needs from a multidisciplinary team of medical professionals. This team-based approach allows staff to develop a close professional relationship with veterans and tailor services to meet their needs. It has since been used as a model for VA medical

facilities across the nation.

Another patient care program with roots firmly established in Grand Junction is the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. The clinic began in 1987, when a group of employees took a handful of disabled veterans up a mountainside to teach them how to ski. The goal was to improve their quality of life and demonstrate that with determination and confidence, they could overcome even the most daunting challenges. That first year was a success, and the clinic has grown into the world's largest rehabilitative sporting event of its kind.

Other initiatives in Grand Junction have led to improvements in management. Employees began by identifying areas they needed to improve. They established key drivers tied to daily operations, implemented strategies to improve service, and tracked progress through performance measures.

Their efforts were recognized in 1999, when Grand Junction earned VA's top quality award, the Robert W. Carey Quality Award. Employees then set their sights on the Presidential Award for Quality, the nation's highest federal quality award.

## How Did They Do It?

Grand Junction VAMC's 300 employees care for about 9,000 veterans, who made nearly 80,000 visits there last year. The facility was chosen to receive the 2001 Presidential Award for Quality—the highest civilian honor given to federal employees and agencies for improving customer service through quality management principles and practices—from a field of 20 candidates. Grand Junction's selection was based on a number of accomplishments. What are they?

- ✓ Scoring higher than the national average in six of eight categories in the National VA Outpatient Survey.
- ✓ Reducing the average time to process medical examinations for compensation and pension claims from 32 days in 1998 to 25 days in 2000.
- ✓ Reducing the 1999 cost per patient 12 percent below the national average.
- ✓ Maintaining patient satisfaction while experiencing a 22 percent reduction in employees per 1,000 patients from 1995 to 1999.
- ✓ Reducing employee turnover from 18 percent in 1997 to 9 percent in 2000.



"We have created a culture of quality at the medical center," said Laurel Stieferman, chief of Clinical Support Service and team leader for the medical center's Carey and President's Quality Award applications. "The feedback we received from those applications was a real treasure and allowed us to make tremendous improvements," she said, referring to how staff used feedback from their applications to improve management practices.

A central theme in the medical center's success is talking with and listening to the veterans they serve. When a patient survey indicated veterans wanted more information on certain topics, like why lab tests were ordered and the side effects of various medications, the Executive Committee formed a Patient Education process action team to directly address these issues.

One of their solutions was to establish a pharmacy counseling booth where veterans can meet with a pharmacist and get answers to all of their questions before picking up their prescriptions. As a result of their efforts, last year Grand Junction became the highest-rated VA medical facility in patient education and veteran satisfaction. "We want to teach patients how to care for themselves, to read their body and be able to interpret their own well-being," said Gretchen Barnes, R.N., chair of the Patient Education Committee.



Grand Junction VAMC serves veterans from western Colorado and eastern Utah.

Open communication between employees and management is another element of the facility's award-winning quality program. An

anonymous e-mail system allows employees to submit suggestions, complaints or comments. Ronald J. Fulk, special assistant to the director, learned about the anonymous e-mail option on VistA during a public affairs conference in Denver and set up the system after he returned to Grand Junction.

Today, he coordinates the anonymous e-mail program and tries to respond directly to any questions or comments received. He said the entries range from suggestions for improving service to veterans, like adding more handicapped parking spaces, to questions about employee benefits and labor-management relations. "Good lines of communication are vital as we work together to serve not only our veterans, but our co-workers as well," Fulk explained.

With roughly 250 volunteers, Grand Junction VAMC has almost as many volunteers as it does full-time employees. And according to Kris Baugh, who has worked in Voluntary Service for more than 25 years, they are integral to the medical center's operation.

Some volunteers, like Leon Sparks, donate their time and expertise to fill highly specialized roles. For the past seven years, Sparks has repaired, cleaned and checked oxygen concentrators in Pulmonary Therapy Service. "Leon is so skilled at what he does," said Baugh. "We are lucky to have such a talented man." Other volunteers fill more traditional roles, like escorting patients to appointments or staffing reception booths, but all play vital roles in helping staff provide the best possible care to veterans and



Employees like registered nurse Kathleen Goe help the facility achieve its vision of being "the preferred health care system for all area veterans."

their families.

During the Excellence in Government Conference, someone jokingly suggested that perhaps the Rocky Mountain air is what makes folks from Grand Junction a little different. But Ron Fulk will tell you it's much simpler than that: "It's just about talking to veterans and listening to what they have to say." □

By Matt Bristol

## National Video News Program Airing Weekly

Have you seen "VA News?" It's a weekly, 10-minute video program designed to provide you timely news and information about VA.

Produced through a partnership between the Office of Public Affairs and VA Employee Education Service, "VA News" airs each Monday at 4:00 a.m., noon, 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. EST over the VA Knowledge Network, with repeat showings daily throughout the week at those times. Check with your facility's satellite coordinator for local times and places where you can view the program. Headquarters employees can view it on Channel 52.

The program's anchors are all VA employees, and each week's edition includes breaking news and features covering all elements of the Department. If you have questions or comments about the program, call (202) 273-5730 or send a e-mail message to [vaneews@mail.va.gov](mailto:vaneews@mail.va.gov). □

# Wheelchair Athletes Show Skills in 'Big Apple'



*Spirit of the Games Award winner Laura Schwanger, an Army veteran from Philadelphia, competes in Super G slalom.*

**H**undreds of wheelchair athletes hit the streets of New York City this summer for the 21<sup>st</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games. They spent their days locked in heated competition, and when the sun dropped below the city skyline, they gathered beneath the bright lights of Times Square to share stories of the day's events and take in the bustling New York nightlife.

Hosted by the Bronx VA Medical Center and Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, the event drew more than 500 veterans, representing nearly 80 VA medical centers. "We were very proud to host the 2001 Wheelchair Games," said Maryann Musumeci, director of the Bronx VAMC. "Close to 1,000 employees and more than 3,000 volunteers put in countless hours to ensure the Games were a success and the athletes enjoyed their visit to the Big Apple."

Some athletes, like James Hauck, a World War II Navy veteran from Des Moines, Iowa, have been involved in wheelchair sports for

years. Others, like 20-year-old Army veteran Reynaldo Cabanlong, from the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa, Fla., experienced the rush of the Wheelchair Games for the first time. Cabanlong, who was injured while on active duty last year, finished rehabilitation at the Tampa VA just in time to join about 120 "novice" athletes from across the country heading to New York. "Compete, stay healthy and come back," is the advice older vets commonly offered the newcomers.

One highlight of the weeklong Wheelchair Games was a July 4<sup>th</sup> "Kids' Day," in which local disabled youngsters got a chance to meet the athletes, watch them compete, and learn how sports can become a part of their lives. Laura Schwanger, an Army vet from the Philadelphia

VA Medical Center and three-time Paralympian, met with the kids to demonstrate how to use adaptive sporting equipment and to share the story of how wheelchair sports have changed her life.

"I enjoy encouraging others to get physical, since sports got me out and into the world," said Schwanger, who had the fastest time in what many call the Games' toughest event, the Super G wheelchair

slalom course. Her unwavering focus and determination in the Super G competition inspired the entire auditorium of athletes, volunteers and spectators, and at the end of the week, she was named the *Spirit of the Games* award winner.

In addition to the traditional wheelchair sporting events, several special exhibitions took place throughout the week. A friendly half-court basketball game held in the heart of Times Square introduced crowds of curious tourists, television reporters, and members of the Times Square Business Improvement District to the fast-paced world of wheelchair basketball.

And later that evening, U.S. Paralympic Sled Hockey goalie and Wheelchair Games athlete Pat Sapp took to the ice to demonstrate his sled hockey techniques. The competi-



*Tricia Sapp, an Army veteran from Rockwall, Texas, fights for the ball during a basketball game.*



*Actress Bo Derek, honorary chairperson of the Games, talks with disabled children at Kids' Day.*



## How It All Began

During President Carter's administration, Max Cleland was the VA Administrator. Being a disabled Vietnam veteran, he enjoyed working out in the gymnasiums by playing basketball. While on a visit to VA field facilities, he decided to work out in one of the gyms, but found it closed and locked. A cry of anguish was heard all the way from the field facility to VA Central Office (VACO). His cry was not so much for himself as it was for all veterans in VA facilities.

At that time, Recreation Service was under the Associate Chief Medical Director for Administration, Jack Westall, in VACO. I was called to his office and told to re-evaluate the VA recreation programs and submit a plan to enhance them. A steering committee was established to review program content, personnel issues and organizational structure. There were many changes made in the administration of recreation programs at the national and local levels that resulted from the steering committee recommendations.

One of the most visible changes was the development of the national programs such as the Winter Sports Clinic, Golden Age Games, Creative Arts Festival and the Wheelchair Games. None of these activities originated from the steering committee or from recreation personnel in VA, but the steering committee

recommended the adoption of these activities and adapting them to VA recreation programs.

After attending the 20<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games in San Antonio, Texas, and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Washington, D.C., last year, I was amazed to see the improvements and sophistications that have occurred over the years. Since many people have managed these programs over the years, and each person has put his or her best effort into making them the best, it is no wonder they are leaving a mark on the lives of our veterans.

Accolades for the success of the VA national recreational programs must go to all individuals and organizations involved in these activities over many years. There were many people involved in the development of these programs, from the pioneers to the newcomers of the present time.

There have been thousands of individuals involved, and each has made an impression on the programs. No one individual or organization can stake a claim on these programs or on their success. The success of these programs must be shared. Each of us, in our own way, heard the cry of anguish from the past, and we should all give thanks for the opportunity to serve those who served our country.

**Wallace J. Lynch**  
Former Director of VA Recreation Service  
Lynchhurst, Va.



*Jesse Gonzales, a Marine Corps veteran from North Branch, Minn., competes in shot put.*

tive sport is just like regular hockey, except the players, who at best have limited use of their legs, sit on a sled and propel themselves with shortened hockey sticks equipped with ice picks on their tips.

"When you lose a leg or become permanently disabled, it devastates you, and part of you dies," said Sapp, who was paralyzed in a parachuting accident while serving as a U.S. Marine. "VA has done a really good job of tuning into those feelings. Playing sports makes you feel reborn ... it's an incredible sense of accomplishment."

Hollywood's Bo Derek served as honorary chairperson of the Games and spent several days meeting with athletes, encouraging their competitions, and presenting medals to event winners. She fired the starting gun for the 5-K road race in Central Park, and posed for and signed hundreds of pictures with awed athletes. The star of the 1979 hit movie, "10," Derek now makes guest appearances on popular television programs, has recently wrapped up an independent film, and is working on a book.

Next year's Games, co-sponsored by VA and Paralyzed Veterans of America, are scheduled for July 9-13 and will be hosted by the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. □

By Matt Bristol

# Senate Confirms Three White House Nominees

The Senate has confirmed three more Bush administration nominees for key positions at VA. All three were sworn in last month.

**Gordon H. Mansfield**, former head of the Washington office of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and a decorated Vietnam veteran, is VA's new Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. He had served as executive director of PVA since 1993.



Mansfield

From 1989 to 1993, Mansfield served as Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Prior to that, he served PVA for eight years in a number of positions, including associate executive director for government relations. He formerly practiced law in Ocala, Fla.

The Army veteran served two tours of duty in the Vietnam War. His combat decorations include the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Presidential Unit Citation. Mansfield sustained a spinal cord injury while serving as a rifle company commander with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during his second tour.

Retired Army officer **Claude M. (Mick) Kicklighter** is VA's Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning. He joined the Department in April 2000 as Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Activities. Later, he was designated to lead the Office of Public and



Kicklighter

Intergovernmental Affairs.

During his 36 years of military

service, Kicklighter commanded the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Light) in Hawaii, held staff assignments from the battalion level to the Department of the Army, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He commanded the U.S. Army Pacific from July 1989 to July 1991. He retired in September 1991 as a Lieutenant General.

In July 1991, Kicklighter was named director of the nation's efforts to thank and honor World War II veterans during the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war.

**John A. Gauss, Ph.D.**, is VA's Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer. He retired from the Navy as a Rear Admiral on June 30 after 32 years.

Gauss is the former Commander of the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command. He directed the development, acquisition, and

management of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems for the Navy and selected Marine Corps and joint service programs. Gauss has also served as the Deputy Director of Engineering at the Defense Information Systems Agency, headquartered in Arlington, Va.



Gauss

His military awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, three Legion of Merit awards, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy Achievement Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal. □

## VA's First Enhanced-Use Energy Project Dedicated in Tennessee

The first privately financed and operated energy facility on VA property was dedicated July 12 at the James H. Quillen VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Mountain Home, Tenn. Through enhanced-use leasing authority, the medical center leased two acres of property to Energy Systems Group (ESG), of Evansville, Ind., to develop, operate and maintain a state-of-the-art energy plant to meet the energy needs of both the VAMC and East Tennessee State University's James H. Quillen College of Medicine.

ESG made energy-efficient building upgrades throughout the facility and at the six other VA medical centers in VISN 9 (Nashville). The initiatives, such as lighting retrofits, replacement of wasteful plumbing fixtures and control upgrades, have reduced energy consumption costs and will save millions that will directly benefit veterans in VISN 9.

The entire project is expected to save VA more than \$11 million in recurring costs and more than \$17 million for equipment and facility

replacement costs over the term of the lease.

The partnership with ESG also calls for the VAMC to share in revenues from energy sales to non-VA customers. Those revenues, which will be in the form of discounts on energy costs, are expected to total about \$5 million a year and will be used by the medical center to fund improved access to its primary care and community-based outpatient clinics.

"This is the right project at the right time, and a model to be emulated by other VA locations across the country," said VA Deputy Secretary Leo S. Mackay Jr., Ph.D., during the dedication ceremony.

Financed through a \$32 million bond issue from the Johnson City, Tenn., Industrial Development Board, the project is the first in the federal government under this type of private/public development authority and financing structure. VA's enhanced-use leasing authority allows the Department to lease property and assets for up to 75 years to private sector entities. □



# POW/MIA Flag Symbolizes Nation's Hope



Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Executive Director of the National League of Families Ann Mills Griffiths, and former League Chairman of the Board Earl P. Hopper (left to right) with the POW/MIA flag at the opening of a permanent POW/MIA display at the Pentagon in the mid-1980s.

Few images evoke emotions as powerful as those stirred by the stark black and white silhouette of a gaunt profile, a piercing strand of barbed wire, and an ominous watchtower set above the pledge, "You Are Not Forgotten."

The image was developed to represent the hopes of families whose loved ones were declared missing in action or held prisoner during the Vietnam War, but has since grown to symbolize the sacrifices of not only those missing, but all who served in America's longest war. September 21 is National POW/MIA Recognition Day, and to mark the occasion, *Vanguard* recounts how the flag came into being.

In 1971, Mrs. Michael Hoff, the wife of a U.S. military officer listed as missing in action during the Vietnam War, developed the idea for a national flag to remind every American of the U.S. servicemembers whose fates were never accounted for during the war.

Newt Heisley, a former World War II pilot, designed the image chosen for the flag. Some claim the silhouette is a profile of Heisley's son, who contracted hepatitis while training to go to Vietnam. The virus ravaged his body, leaving his features hollow and emaciated. They suggest that while staring at his son's sunken features, Heisley saw the stark image of American servicemembers held captive under

harsh conditions. Using a pencil, he sketched his son's profile, creating the basis for a symbol that would come to have a powerful impact on the national conscience.

By the end of the Vietnam War, more than 2,500 servicemembers were listed by the Department of Defense as Prisoner of War or Missing in Action. In 1979, as families of the

missing pressed for full accountability, Congress and the president proclaimed the first National POW/MIA Recognition Day to acknowledge the families' concerns and symbolize the steadfast resolve of the American people never to forget the men and women who gave up their freedom protecting ours. Three years later, in 1982, the POW/MIA flag became the only flag other than the Stars and Stripes to fly above the White House.

On August 10, 1990, Congress passed U.S. Public Law 101-355, designating the POW/MIA flag: "The symbol of our Nation's concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia."

Congress designated the third Friday of September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day and ordered prominent display of the POW/MIA flag on this day and several other national observances, including Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day.

The 1998 Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 105-85) mandates that on these national observances, the POW/MIA flag is to be flown over the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Korean and Vietnam Veterans War Memorials, the offices of the Secretaries of State, Defense and Veterans Affairs, offices of the

director of the Selective Service System, every major military installation (as directed by the Secretary of Defense), every post office, and VA medical centers and national cemeteries. The act also directs VA medical centers to fly the POW/MIA flag on any day on which the flag of the United States is displayed.

When displayed from a single flagpole, the POW/MIA flag should fly directly below, and be no larger than, the United States flag. If on separate poles, the U.S. flag should always be placed to the right of other flags. On the six national observances for which Congress has ordered display of the POW/MIA flag, it is generally flown immediately below or adjacent to the United States flag as second in order of precedence. □

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## 'Day of Honor' (cont.)

"World War II was won by Americans of every race and color. Minority veterans represent chapters of World War II history that deserve to be added to the textbooks. Their wealth of history should no longer be ignored."

Freeman, Syracuse VA Medical Center (VAMC)'s minority affairs program manager, said the recognition program was only the first step in what he and other members of the facility's Day of Honor Committee hope to achieve in Central New York. "The committee is now working with local school districts to effect change in the way history is taught," he said. "Plans are already underway for this fall semester to bring these minority veterans into the classroom so that new generations may better understand the impact World War II had on all Americans."

Syracuse VAMC's Public Affairs Officer Gordon Sclar said the Day of Honor was "truly an emotional event. Secretary Principi and Congressman Walsh made a tremendous impact on our minority community. Minority veterans finally received the recognition they'd wanted for so long." One 82-year-old veteran put it this way: "If I should pass away tomorrow, I now feel my life has been fulfilled." □



# Fair Brings Higher Learning to VACO Employees



*This summer's VACO college fair drew more than 350 employees interested in higher learning opportunities.*

Vickie Nitschke always wanted to get her master's degree, but could never find the time to attend those open houses or college fairs at the universities she wanted to attend. So the program analyst in VA Central

Office decided to bring the universities to her. She came up with the idea of having a college fair in VA Central Office so employees could speak with representatives from various universities to learn about degree programs they offer.

"I thought there had to be other employees interested in something like this," said Nitschke, "and I wanted them to find this convenient for their schedules so they'd be more inclined to continue their education."

She pitched the idea to the Federal Women's Program (FWP), of which she is a committee member, and the college fair was planned. FWP Manager Linda Howell, a counsel at the Board of Veterans' Appeals, explained, "[The college fair] is part of our mission in the Federal Women's Program—to promote the advancement of women in the federal government. We hope to do this every summer."

Nearly 350 employees stopped by during the event to learn about degree programs, continuing education and financial aid from representatives of about 50 colleges and

universities—from the across-the-country Universities of Phoenix and Oklahoma, with their distance learning programs, to the across-town American and Catholic Universities.

Some employees brought their college-bound children to the fair, while others gathered brochures, applications and other information to take home. And most seemed to appreciate having representatives from various colleges and universities come to them, instead of having to take time out of their schedules to visit those schools. □

## CFC 2001: Employees Have Two Options for Making Contributions

The 2001 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), the government's annual fund-raising drive, begins this month for most federal employees. VA Secretary Anthony Principi is serving as national chairperson of this year's campaign.

VA employees have two options for making contributions to CFC: use HR LINK\$ or fill out a pledge card and turn it in to your facility's CFC chairperson or key worker. Last year, employees were required to use HR LINK\$ to make their contributions, but because of concerns raised by VA leadership, employees now also have the option of filling out pledge cards.

This change in policy applies only

to CFC, however. All other Employee Self Service transactions must be conducted using HR LINK\$.

Using HR LINK\$ to make contributions takes just a few minutes, and contribution information will be stored in the system for future

reference. CFC chairpersons at each station also will receive weekly automated reports to monitor the success of the campaign at their facility.

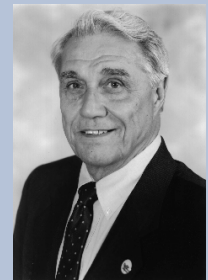
More information on HR LINK\$ and the CFC

campaign is available on the Shared Service Center Web site at [www.hrlinks.aac.va.gov](http://www.hrlinks.aac.va.gov). For more information on the 2001 CFC campaign, visit the OPM Web site at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov). □



### In Memoriam

Kenneth H. Bargmann, 77, former VA project officer for the World War II 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration and executive director of the American Ex-Prisoners of War, died July 29 at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center.



*Bargmann*

Bargmann served in the Army during World War II and participated in the first wave of the D-Day invasion. He was wounded and captured in June 1944 and liberated about 10 months later from Stalag 3-A near Luckenwalde, Germany. He was the recipient of a Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

The retired businessman joined VA in the mid-1990s to lead the agency's World War II commemoration activities. He headed the POW organization until seven months before his death.

Bargmann was also a member of Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Survivors include his wife of 54 years, Inez, and four children. □



## Study Finds Dental X-Ray Can Identify High Stroke Risk in Post-Menopausal Women

A new study by VA dentists has found a certain type of dental X-ray can identify post-menopausal women at high risk for stroke. The study, published in the August 2001 *Journal of the American Dental Association*, showed that besides yielding a wide view of the jaw, panoramic radiographs can detect the presence of stroke-causing plaques in the carotid arteries of the neck.

According to researcher Arthur H. Friedlander, D.D.S., these panoramic radiographs should not replace more accurate screening and diagnostic methods for stroke, such as ultrasound. But they can stretch the preventive-health value of dental visits.

"The panoramic radiograph is exceedingly crude—it only shows late disease. And we are not recommending it as a screening tool at all. But we are saying that if a dentist, for dental needs, obtains a panoramic radiograph, then it should be read in its entirety," said Friedlander, associate chief of staff for graduate medical education at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System and professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery at the School of Dentistry at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Post-menopausal women account for about 60 percent of stroke deaths in the United States. The culprit in most cases is fatty deposits in the carotid arteries, which block the flow of blood to the brain. Detecting these deposits early allows patients to take live-saving preventive measures such as dietary changes, medication and even surgery to remove the plaque.

Friedlander urges patients, especially post-menopausal women, to be aware of this when they visit their dentist or oral surgeon. "If you go to the dentist and he has to take this X-ray, then make sure he reads it for this finding," he said.

Collaborating on the study was Lisa Altman, M.D., director of the Women's Health Clinic at the Sepulveda VA Medical Center and a clinical associate professor at the UCLA School of Medicine.

## Iowa City VAMC Researchers Examine Incidence of Assault on Military Women

Of 537 women veterans responding to the Women's Military Environment Survey conducted by Iowa City, Iowa, VA Medical Center (VAMC) and University of Iowa researchers, 79 percent reported experiencing sexual harassment during their military service, slightly more than half reported unwanted sexual contact, and 21 percent said they experienced violence within the context of rape.

"With more than one-half million females serving in the U.S. Department of Defense, military women are an important population from which to learn more about

women in the workplace and the consequence of violence," said Anne Sadler, Ph.D., a registered nurse at the Iowa City VAMC who designed and led the study. Researchers found environmental factors within the military contributed to the risk for non-fatal physical and sexual assault against women. For instance, women who lived in mixed-gender barracks and experienced unwanted sexual advances, comments or pressure for dates from men who shared the barracks were seven times more likely to be physically assaulted.

Bradley Doebbeling, M.D., staff physician at the Iowa City VAMC and associate professor of internal medicine and epidemiology at the University of Iowa, hopes the study findings will help create interventions in both military and non-military work settings to lower the number of assault victims.

Study participants were selected from VA's women's health care registry. They took part in an extensive interview and completed the Women's Military Environment Survey, designed specifically for this study.

A previous study by Sadler and Doebbeling examined how physical violence or sexual assault in the workplace influenced women veterans' decisions to seek health care. The earlier study, published in the September 2000 issue of the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, found women who were both physically and sexually assaulted while in the military were more likely to report chronic health problems and use prescription drugs for mental health problems.

## Dallas VAMC Begins High-Dose Radiation Cancer Treatment

Doctors in the VA North Texas Health Care System have started a new cancer treatment program that is safer and more effective than the traditional external beam radiation technique. The High Dose Rate brachytherapy technology combines computer-based treatment with catheter or needle placement of a radioactive source—Iridium 192—directly in a tumor site. It takes only a few minutes to deliver the dose directly to the tumor using a computer program. The radioactive source is then replaced into its shielded container.

According to Dr. John E. Antoine, chief of Radiation Oncology Service at the medical center and professor of Radiation Oncology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, the VA North Texas Health Care System is one of the first VA medical systems to offer this advanced treatment. He said this new technique poses less risk to patients because there is less damage to normal healthy tissue near the tumor site. Additionally, the high dose implant requires only two or three treatments, rather than the multiple treatments with external beam techniques, which can take as long as eight weeks.

The high dose procedure can be performed on an outpatient basis and is currently being offered to patients at the Dallas VA Medical Center to treat cancers of the lung, esophagus, cervix and uterus. Ultimately, the procedure will also be used for cancers of the prostate and head and neck. "High Dose Rate (treatment) provides a more precise and cost-effective treatment for these cancers," concluded Antoine. Dr. Nam P. Nguyen directs the Dallas VA brachytherapy program. □

# HONORS and awards



The Georgia Nurses Association named **Martha Ann “Marty” Baumann, R.N.**, a nurse practitioner at the **Augusta, Ga., VA Medical Center**, as the 2001 Georgia Nurse of the Year. Baumann cares for 52 veterans living in a 50-mile area and makes monthly home visits to monitor their health and well-being. She first became a nurse in 1961, and over the years has served as a staff nurse, nurse manager, nursing instructor and in-service educator. She is active in the Alzheimer’s Association, American Nurses Association, Georgia Nurses Association, and serves as president of the Greater Augusta Diabetes Educators.

**Douglas Noffsinger, Ph.D.**, chief of Audiology and Speech Pathology Service in the **VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System**, is the recipient of the 21<sup>st</sup> Olin E. Teague Award. Noffsinger was the lead VA member on a committee of audiology professionals from VA, the American Academy of Audiology, and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association who worked together from 1996 to 2000 to develop clinical practice protocols that have been formally accepted as policy by all public and private sector audiology associations. This collaborative effort will improve the quality and



*Noffsinger*

consistency of rehabilitative treatment for hearing loss throughout the country. He has also developed a policy for determining hearing aid eligibility among veterans with hearing loss that has been implemented by the VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System. This policy is being considered for implementation throughout the Desert Pacific Healthcare Network (VISN 22) and has the potential to be adopted throughout VA. The Olin E. Teague Award is one of the highest awards given by VA and pays honor to an employee who has made exemplary contributions in the area of rehabilitation and improvement in the quality of life of war-injured veterans.

The American Legion, Department of Texas, selected **Dan Howard**, a coach in the Field Section of the **Waco, Texas, VA Regional Office**, as VA Employee of the Year for the Waco region. Howard received an engraved plaque bearing the words, “In sincere appreciation for your devoted efforts and assistance to the American Legion Department Service Officers in promoting the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Programs.”

**Lourdes M. Heuermann**, a pharmacist in the **VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System** in Grand Island, Neb., received the Merck Achievement Award during the 2001 Nebraska Pharmacists Association Annual Convention. Heuermann is a Fellow in the American Society of

Consultant Pharmacists and is clinical adjunct faculty at both Creighton and University of Nebraska Colleges of Pharmacy. The Merck Achievement Award is presented annually to pharmacists throughout the nation who are recognized as leaders in their profession and community.

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) awarded its Education Recognition Certificate to the diabetes self-management education program of the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System**. Programs applying for ADA recognition voluntarily submit to a rigorous review process by experts in the field of diabetes. They evaluate each program on its ability to provide patients with a comprehensive education program.

**Dr. H. Gilbert Welch**, co-director of the VA Outcomes Group in the **White River Junction, Vt., VA Medical and Regional Office Center**, was granted a Visiting Scientist Award and will join the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the cancer division of the World Health Organization, for the academic year 2001-2002. He will join the descriptive epidemiology unit in the agency’s headquarters in Lyon, France, where he will work on cataloguing world cancer incidence and mortality data.

Two researchers from the **San Francisco VA Medical Center** received grants from the Paul Beeson Physician Faculty Scholars in Aging Research Program, administered by the American Federation for Aging Research. **Kristine Yaffe, M.D.**, chief of geriatric psychiatry, and **Mary Whooley, M.D.**, a

staff physician, were two of eleven researchers nationwide to receive grants. Both physicians are assistant professors at the University of California at San Francisco. Yaffe is studying risk factors for cognitive decline in the elderly, and Whooley is examining the effect of depression on coronary disease. The Beeson grant provides each recipient \$450,000 over three years to fund their research.

**Dr. Leslie Gonzalez-Rothi**, speech pathologist and program director of the Brain Rehabilitation Research Center at the **Malcom Randall VA Medical Center** in Gainesville, Fla., is slated to become president of the International Neuropsychological Society. She will serve as president-elect until February, when she will assume a one-year term as president. She is the first speech pathologist selected as president since the organization’s 1967 founding.

The Nevada State Psychological Association named **William Danton, Ph.D.**, from the **VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System**, as Nevada’s Outstanding Psychologist of the Year.

**George Kaysen, M.D.**, chief of Nephrology at the **VA Northern California Healthcare System**, was honored for his achievements in nephrology by the Northern California chapter of the National Kidney Foundation. Kaysen, a world-renowned physician and scientist, was awarded the Champion of Hope award for his contributions to the understanding of hypoalbuminemia in renal failure and nephritic syndrome, two conditions common in patients with kidney disease. □



# HAVE you heard

## Time Capsule Treasures



Vincent Ng (left), director of the Providence, R.I., VA Medical Center, and Ron Hogan, senior resident engineer, examine the contents of the time capsule as employees look on.

A time capsule from 1896 was discovered during demolition of a run-down Catholic school near the grounds of the **Providence, R.I., VA Medical Center**. The medical center purchased the property and school about 10 years ago, with plans to make it the future site of the VA regional office. When those plans fell through, the building sat vacant and was eventually slated for demolition. Demolition began in July and the time capsule was soon discovered in the cornerstone.

Employees waited until the annual employee recognition picnic to crack open the time capsule. It contained newspapers dated October 31, 1896, two handwritten letters, five coins, rosary beads and other religious artifacts. The items will be displayed at the medical center.

The **Treasury Department** sent letters to about 380,000 veterans this summer to remind them that they owe money to the federal government and the money can be withheld from their Internal Revenue Service rebate checks. The rebates are a result of President Bush's tax cut bill and are being mailed over a ten-week period that began July 23. Federal law says when veterans, their dependents or survivors owe more than \$25 to VA and the debts are more than 180 days overdue, VA officials must report the debts to the

Treasury Department for possible offset from most government payments. The combined amount owed in health care and benefit debts is about \$184 million.

ScientificAmerican.com named HIV inSite, a Web site created, written and edited by **Paul Volberding, M.D.**, chief of Medical Service at the **San Francisco VA Medical Center** and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF), as one of the best Web resources for information on science and

technology. With more than 30,000 pages of AIDS and HIV information, including a complete database of anti-retroviral drugs and how they should be used, the site is the only comprehensive multidisciplinary Internet source of global information about HIV. The Web address is [hivinsite.ucsf.edu](http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu). In recognizing HIV inSite, the editors of ScientificAmerican.com have further endorsed the position of the San Francisco VAMC and UCSF as pioneers in the battle against HIV disease.

Korean War veterans with sons or daughters employed by the **Denver VA Regional Office** were invited to share their wartime experiences with VA staff and family during a special ceremony in June.

After hearing their stories, **Mike Hutchinson**, chief of Support Services, presented each of the veterans a Korean War lapel pin.

Veterans entering the Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service at the **VA North Texas Health Care System** are spending less time in the waiting area thanks to a new greeting system called HOWDY. The automated log-in system prompts patients to begin by scanning their veteran identification card. Once they scan the card, HOWDY automatically queries the database for any pending laboratory orders and veterans are called in when their order is complete. The new system was developed to reduce waiting times. □

## Recycling = \$\$\$ for Veterans

**VA San Diego Healthcare System** volunteer **William Vana** recently donated \$1,000 to the medical center, money he collected from recycling soda cans. For the past ten years, Vana has picked up empty soda cans from the medical center trash and taken them to the recycling center.

He gave the proceeds, paid in \$2 bills, to Voluntary Service. Over the years, the money accumulated in the office safe. Vana recently presented the 500 \$2 bills to Gary Rossio, director of the VA San Diego Healthcare System. The money will be deposited into the VA Voluntary Service General Post Fund and be used for the comfort and recreation of hospitalized veterans.



Gary Rossio, director of the VA San Diego Healthcare System, accepts a \$1,000 donation from volunteer Bill Vana as VA Voluntary Service Committee President Adrian Marine looks on.

# HEROES

☆☆☆☆☆

**Joe Borba** knew something was wrong when he saw clouds of smoke near the front entrance of the **San Joaquin Valley, Calif., National Cemetery**. He immediately radioed the main office and asked his colleagues to call 911. Then he rushed to the cemetery maintenance area to get one of the firefighting rigs and hustled back to the front gate, where ranchers from an adjacent property were trying to get a grass fire under control. A downed 750,000-volt, high-tension power line had caused the fire and the live wire partially blocked the cemetery's entrance. Borba stayed on the scene and tried to contain the fire until emergency crews arrived. Later, workers from the local utility company

arrived to repair the line. Thanks to Borba's efforts, there was no injury or property loss.

☆☆☆☆☆

**Irene Lombardino, R.N.**, was walking to her car on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the parking garage at the **Denver VA Medical Center** when she saw a man about to jump to the ground. She called out and tried to reason with him but he wouldn't let her get close. He was sitting on the garage wall and suddenly stood up and began to rock back and forth as he struggled to keep his balance on the ledge. "I was terrified," said Lombardino. Meanwhile, **Melissa Pacheco**, from Human Resources Management, was

walking to her car when she noticed the commotion. She heard Lombardino screaming "don't jump, don't jump," so she ran to a phone to call police. Before the police arrived, Lombardino coaxed the man from the ledge and tried to calm him down. But as soon as he saw Police Officers **Brian Phelps** and **Andrew Prokop** approach, he tried to run toward the wall. Lombardino grabbed him by the belt and held on until the officers could get him under control. Had it not been for the efforts of these employees, this incident likely would have ended in tragedy.

☆☆☆☆☆


While vacationing in Rehoboth Beach, Del., this summer, **Debra Calvey**, a nursing assistant at the **Wilkes-Barre, Pa., VA Medical Center**, was swimming in the ocean when she felt something brush against her body. "I looked down and there was nothing there," she recalled. Then, as she looked around, she noticed a woman drifting in the surf. "Her eyes were rolled back in her head and her head was shaking as if she was having a seizure. I got one of my arms under her and began dragging her out of the water. I could feel that she had a pulse and I was screaming for someone to help." When she finally reached the beach, two men helped pull the woman out of the water. "Her whole body started shaking. I turned her over on her side and water rushed out of her mouth." Lifeguards and paramedics arrived and transported the victim to a medical facility, where she recovered.

☆☆☆☆☆

When two vehicles collided at an intersection, **Terry V. Kruzan**, a program-

mer with the **Academic Information Management Center** in **St. Louis, Mo.**, hesitated just long enough to tell his daughter to "stay put" before he jumped out of his car and ran to the scene of the accident. One of the vehicles had flipped onto its side and was leaking gasoline. Disregarding his own safety, Kruzan climbed onto the side of the flipped vehicle and pulled a young boy to safety. He then turned his attention to the boy's mother. Her legs were pinned beneath the steering wheel and she was unable to wiggle free. Kruzan asked if she was okay. She yelled out that she was, and said she just wanted to rest for a moment. He knew time was of the essence, so he climbed inside the vehicle, helped the woman free her legs, and lifted her to safety. When emergency crews arrived, he quietly left the scene and drove home.

☆☆☆☆☆

Driving home from work, **Janel Schiele**, a registered nurse at the **Minot, N.D., VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic**, arrived on the scene of a car accident and saw a man lying in the middle of Highway 83. He had been thrown from his vehicle. She jumped out of her car and provided emergency care, including starting an artificial ventilation passage, for the victim. Thanks to her immediate medical assistance, the victim survived. 

## Correction

The link we included in the article on VetPop2000 in the August issue doesn't work. To access VetPop2000 on the VA Web site, go to [www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata). Click on "Demographics" in the left margin. "VetPop2000" will appear at the top of the page.

## Wildlife Need Heroes, Too

**Jack F. Flynn**, area emergency manager at the **VA Hudson Valley Health Care System's** Castle Point campus and chief of his community's Volunteer Fire Department, was one of several rescuers racing to save a two-week-old fawn swept away by flash floodwaters in the Upper Delaware River. His fire department rescue squad, which is often called on to rescue or recover victims from swimming or canoeing incidents, launched a special airboat capable of navigating the floodwater.

Divers located the fawn and brought it ashore to wildlife specialists from the New York Department of Conservation. Flynn said that once safely ashore, the fawn began nuzzling and licking the faces of its rescuers.



*Jack Flynn watches as James B. Van Horn holds the fawn they helped rescue.*