

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

# VAanguard

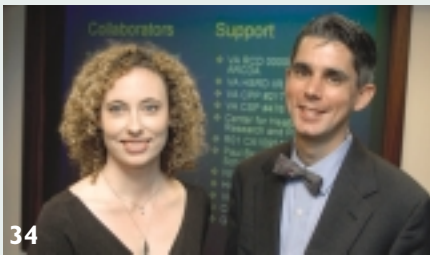
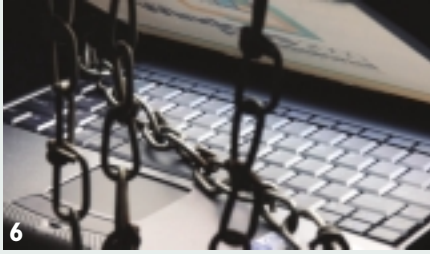
September/October 2006

*Preparing for a Pandemic*

*IT Realignment*

*VA's Oldest Active Volunteer*

*Veterans History Project*



**Vanguard**

VA's Employee Magazine  
 September/October 2006  
 Vol. LII, No. 5

Printed on 50% recycled paper

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 Published by the Office of Public Affairs (80D)

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**On the cover**

VA Central Office Health Unit nurse Dionisia Mann prepares a flu shot. The threat of pandemic flu makes getting an annual flu shot more important than ever to prevent respiratory disease in veterans and employees. VA has been preparing for pandemic flu, as well as the 2006-2007 regular flu season, which runs from September to March. *photo by Robert Turtill*

**Marine Corps Commandant Should Have Been Identified**

Thanks so much for publishing such a great magazine. I enjoy every edition and have shared many articles with other VA employees and my family.

In your July/August issue on page 26 there is a picture of Secretary Nicholson standing next to a Marine as the National Anthem is played prior to the first pitch of a Washington Nationals game. The Marine is Gen. Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps. Gen. Hagee is the highest-ranking officer of the Marine Corps and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It might have been appropriate to include his name in the caption. Former Marines are sensitive about such things.

*Marty Traxler  
Chief, Acquisition and Materiel Management  
Asheville, N.C., VAMC*

**We Want to Hear from You**

Have a comment on something you've seen in *Vanguard*? We invite reader feedback. Send your comments to [vanguard@va.gov](mailto:vanguard@va.gov). You can also write to us at: *Vanguard*, Office of Public Affairs (80D), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20420, or fax your letter to (202) 273-6702. Include your name, title and VA facility. We won't be able to publish every letter, but we'll use representative ones. We may need to edit your letter for length or clarity.

**Veterans: Wear Your Medals With Pride on Nov. 11**

VA Secretary Jim Nicholson is calling on America's 24 million veterans to wear their military medals with pride on Veterans Day. He announced the "Veterans Pride" campaign in Washington, D.C., flanked by representatives of national veterans service organizations wearing their military decorations.



"We want all veterans to wear their military medals on Veterans Day to show their pride in their service and focus public pride on them," the Secretary said. "That's what Veterans Day is all about."

Secretary Nicholson noted that Veterans Day 2006 is just the kick-off to a campaign that he hopes will become a tradition in this country on every Veterans Day, Memorial Day and Fourth of July. He emphasized that survivors and descendants are also invited to wear the medals of their deceased veteran relatives "to honor their service and their memory."

A new VA Veterans Pride Web site, accessible through the VA home page at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), offers background on the program and guidance on how to participate, including how to find out what medals a veteran has earned, how to order them and how to wear them—over left breast for veterans, right for family and descendants.



**'Doonesbury' Cartoonist Book Signing**

Garry Trudeau was in the VA Central Office canteen on Sept. 25 signing copies of his two books chronicling the journey of the "Doonesbury" comic strip character "B.D." through war and recovery. B.D. lost a leg while serving with the Army National Guard in Iraq. Trudeau signed copies of the books, "The Long Road Home: One Step at a Time" and "The War Within," for Susan McCrea and other employees for more than four hours. Proceeds from the sales of the books will go to the Fisher House Foundation.



## The Information Technology Transformation Begins

*Jim Nicholson*  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

VA has embarked on a venture no less sweeping than our conversion to electronic health records in the 1990s and no less promising for the future of our service to veterans.

On Oct. 1, some 4,500 VA employees were formally reassigned to the Office of Information and Technology, yet another step in a years-long conversion to a centralized information technology system covering operations and maintenance for the entire department.

It is these men and women who have made VA renowned and respected for its management and administration of information and technology, and it is they who will lead the agency and its service to veterans in the 21st century.

This will not be an easy or quick transformation, and there's a natural response among some people to be uncomfortable with change on such a scale. But the prospects of the power we can harness through this centralization are exciting. They are exciting not only in terms of the professional challenges involved but also by virtue of the increased capacities and efficiencies that can be brought to bear as we continue to strive towards delivering the best possible services to the veterans who rely on VA every day.

The IT professionals within VA work in all manner of capacities across the entire VA system. Some maintain the systems that manage the disability and compensation payments that bring security

and stability to millions of families. Others work with our award-winning electronic health records that make the miracles of medicine a reality every day in our medical centers. Others are involved in making sure the insurance, home loan guarantees and educational benefits keep moving to the veterans who have earned them.

Our IT systems and the work we do with them are no less diverse than the people who keep those systems running at the peak of professionalism. But diverse as these people and systems are, there

***VA has embarked on a venture no less sweeping than our conversion to electronic health records in the 1990s and no less promising for our service to veterans.***

is one common and constant thread that connects all of us as members of the VA family. It is that solemn pledge to care for veterans.

The focus of this department is and shall always be to care for the men and women who wore the uniform of the United States. Technology allows us to serve more veterans with greater efficiency, but change will not diffuse our focus and our mission.

We owe a duty to the 235,000 VA employees that make us one of the most effective and important organizations in the federal government. As we proceed with this transformation, it's important to understand some of the mechanics involved in it, particularly those involving per-

sonnel.

For those of you working in IT operations and maintenance, you will continue to do your job just as you always have, working in the same place with the same colleagues you've come to trust and rely upon. Excellence and innovation will continue to be fostered, recognized and rewarded, just as they always have.

In most respects, this reassignment step is administrative in nature and puts VA on the path toward complying with the intent of the Congress—that is, to bring our in-

formation technology operations and maintenance staff, budget and operations under the umbrella of a single organization, the Office of Information and Technology.

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### Leading the Charge

VA's IT transformation will be led by Bob Howard, who was confirmed by the Senate as VA's new Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology (and Chief Information Officer) on Sept. 30. He had been the acting Assistant Secretary since May. Howard is a former business executive and a retired Army general.



## A Summer of Service in the Nation's Capital

Jenny Pelaez  
Summer Intern

*Editor's note: Every summer, students pour into the nation's capital from colleges and universities around the country, looking for a rewarding summer internship. We invited one of them to share her experience as an intern in VA headquarters: what she did, what she learned, and what she will carry with her into the future. Jenny Pelaez is a junior at the University of Pennsylvania, where she's pursuing a bachelor's degree in communications and public service.*

I never know where to start when people ask me about my summer internship in VA Central Office. I am writing this article a couple of weeks after the close of my internship and find that like all great extended experiences, it becomes too hard to capture it all in a few sentences, and I am forced to reduce it all to a generic, "It was wonderful!" At a distance, however, while individual day-to-day stories begin to blend into each other, I am able to see more clearly the impact my experience at VA has had on my goals and my perspective.

The most significant changes my family and friends have noted in me are my new level of civic awareness, and my new sense of direction in public service. In a world where everyone is always on the go, and people are always competing with each other for the best in material titles and possessions, a career in public service has lost its popularity for many students. Additionally, many take a cynical view

of the government, especially its bureaucratic aspects.

My time at VA, however, revealed a cadre of dedicated individuals who truly believed in the mission entrusted to them, and the honor of fulfilling that mission. There was no bureaucratic "machine," no complacent ivory tower of languishing clerks behind desks who forgot that there were people behind the papers they pushed around.

Yes, there are the realities of, and limitations caused by, having to manage a multi-legged organization with millions of constituents. But the system is occupied by individuals who do their best to serve veterans within the boundaries set by the natural limitations of such an organization.

### **My time at VA revealed a cadre of dedicated individuals who truly believed in the mission entrusted to them, and the honor of fulfilling that mission.**

These people, who were so eager to teach, so welcoming that they became my second family, and who treated me with such equality that I often forgot I was merely the intern, have inspired me to see a future in public service, despite years of being pushed towards extremely lucrative careers in private industry. There is an honor and fulfillment in it that I hope to have in whichever career I pursue.

There was a minimal amount of busywork and simple clerical paper pushing in my internship. I was con-

stantly learning, even when the lesson of the day was patience!

As a junior executive correspondence reviewer in the Office of the Secretary, I was exposed to every aspect of VA's involvement in a veteran's life—which literally amounted to learning about every aspect of a veteran's life. I learned about such varying issues as post-traumatic stress disorder, the health effects of Agent Orange, homelessness, the Wheelchair Games, security, and burial rights.

In order to better understand the issues affecting veterans' lives, it was also important to keep abreast of current events and understand how they affect veterans, how we serve them, and how we can serve them better. I also had

A few months ago, I went to a professor to ask advice on choosing between a few promising internship offers. He told me that to this nation, veterans are sacred, and thus, VA is conferred sacred status. It was a tremendous opportunity to be able to see this sacred institution at work. As an aside, it was likewise interesting, though unfortunate, to see this sacred institution become political fair game in light of recent events.

First and foremost, however, VA interested me because it is one of the few federal agencies primarily dedicated to service. Our veterans have selflessly endured so much to defend the way we live our lives. Their ranks are filled with both great and unsung heroes, especially of the more

the wonderful opportunity to get to know different offices within the department, attend congressional hearings, and visit the Court of Veterans Appeals and Arlington National Cemetery.

I have often been asked, why VA? A more typical D.C. internship might have been on Capitol Hill, or perhaps a political consulting firm. As far as federal agencies go, VA is not one of the more glamorous of posts, like the State Department. VA has relatively little visibility with the general public.

recent conflicts—the forgotten Korean War, Vietnam, and up to the ongoing war in Iraq.

It is only fitting that the nation's second largest federal agency, though ironically also often unsung and forgotten, is dedicated to serving these individuals. These were things I knew somewhere in the back of my mind at the beginning of my internship. I may have even been able to write those exact words before even seeing the inside of VA. But it took the experience for me to feel and mean those words as deeply as I do today. **VA**

# Making VA the 'Gold Standard' in IT Security

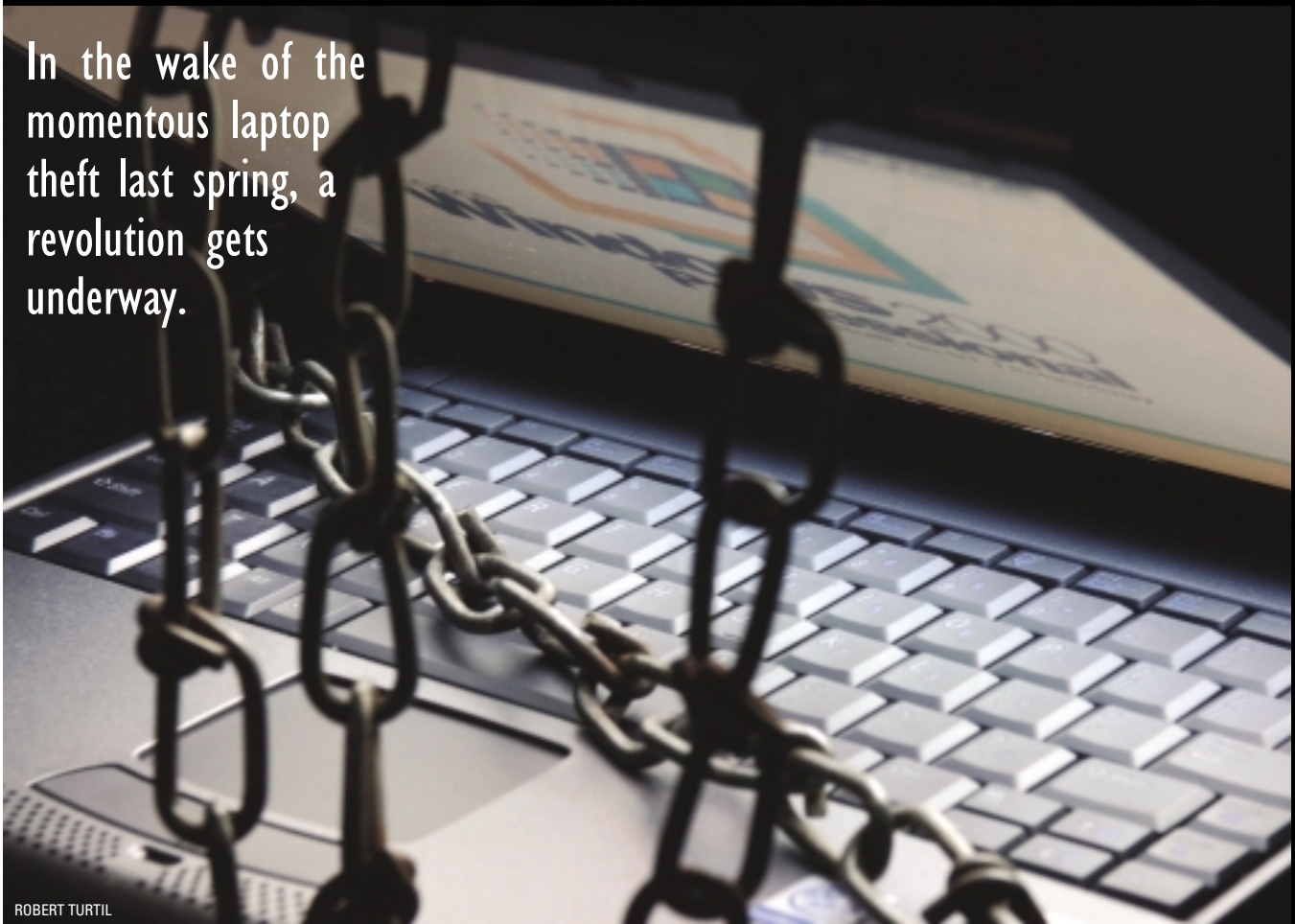
**F**or VA Information Technology, the past few months have been, as Charles Dickens penned in his classic novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, the best and worst of times.

While the national media discovered VA's vaunted electronic medical records system, holding it up as a national model for quality health care, the department suffered a monstrous black eye in the wake of the federal

government's largest loss of sensitive personal information, potentially subjecting millions of veterans to identity theft.

And, as Dickens' famed book dealt with the French Revolution,

In the wake of the momentous laptop theft last spring, a revolution gets underway.



ROBERT TURTEL

this summer of IT discontent led to a revolution within VA spurred by Secretary Jim Nicholson's vow to "make VA the gold standard in the area of information security, just as we've done in the area of electronic medical records."

That revolution actually began last October when Secretary Nicholson approved major restructuring of the IT management system under a reorganization plan to begin consolidating most information technology under the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology—VA's Chief Information Officer.

On March 22 of this year, the Secretary approved the "Federated IT System Model" that gave the CIO control of VA's entire IT operations and management functions. That action permanently assigned about 4,500 IT operations and maintenance personnel from the three administrations to the Office of Information and Technology on Oct. 1.

Secretary Nicholson further strengthened the CIO on June 28 when he delegated to the Assistant Secretary for IT all authorities and responsibilities given to him by the Federal Information Security Management Act. That empowers the CIO to focus top management's attention on information security, cyber security and employee training and compliance in these areas.

In the wake of the momentous laptop computer theft in early May, the Secretary announced on May 22 that VA would send letters to the millions of affected veterans warning them of the loss of their personal information and advising them of the availability of free credit reports. VA established a call center for veterans concerned about the status of their personal information and Secretary Nicholson asked the Inspector General to expedite its investigation into the matter.

In a memo to all VA employees that same day, the Secretary required early completion of mandatory annual general privacy and VA cyber security awareness training.

On May 25, the VA IG testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs that IG audits since 2001 had found major "vulnerabilities" in information security. The IG and later the GAO told lawmakers that centralizing IT authority throughout the department would help solve the problem.

The focus shifted to employees on June 6, when Secretary Nicholson told his top managers that supervisors must specifically authorize employees to remove Privacy Act-protected data from their workplaces and must ensure that the data is encrypted and password-protected. Employees were to immediately report any data losses to their supervisors and VBA employees were barred from moving claims files from their offices to other work locations.

The next day, VA Directive 6504 was distributed to all employees, providing detailed restrictions on transmitting data outside VA and remotely accessing the Intranet.

The IT security message was brought home to every employee June 26-30, declared by the Secretary as VA Privacy and Cyber Security Week. Each day of the week was marked by a VA-wide broadcast of a video message by the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and the three Under Secretaries, as each facility instructed employees on their IT security responsibilities. That week Human Resources asked each employee to make a personal commitment to the cause of data protection by signing a "Statement of Commitment and Understanding."

To assist VA leadership in communicating details affecting the permanent reassignment of the adminis-

trations' IT personnel to the Office of Information and Technology, the department contracted with MITRE Corporation to aid in the transition effort. MITRE's work complements a more comprehensive 24-month IBM program to assess and assist VA's historic transformation of its IT management system.

VA followed through on a major data security measure in August with a contract for encryption of sensitive data primarily on mobile devices such as laptop computers. By the end of September, some 14,000 VA-issued laptops had been encrypted.

In September, a critical piece in the IT security puzzle fell into place: Directive 0735 was issued establishing a standards and credentialing policy to implement personal identity verification of federal employees and contractors, as required government-wide. That directive governs badges and other identifiers used by anyone with access to federally controlled information systems, information protected by privacy and confidentiality laws and the buildings that house them.

VA isn't the "gold standard" in IT security yet, but changes affecting organization, policy, procedures and equipment are proceeding at a revolutionary pace. Data encryption, employee data access verification, and centralizing IT control are well underway, and more is coming as new CIO Bob Howard, confirmed by the Senate Sept. 30, takes over.

Cultural change is the goal and to make that happen it will take, as Secretary Nicholson told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee during a July 20 hearing, "people with training and character to assume the responsibility to implement the changes needed.

"In fact," he told the committee members, "it is our people that will make all of this happen." **VA**

How the department improved its management of people under the President's Management Agenda and what it means for employees.



*Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration R. Allen Pittman addresses attendees at the national HR conference held recently in Las Vegas. He led the department to "green" status on the President's management scorecard in the area of human capital.*

COURTESY OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

## VA Goes Green

The department has recently reached a milestone by improving its management of people under the President's Management Agenda (PMA). What does this mean for employees? Better strategies for educating them on how to achieve their career goals.

When President Bush took office, he wanted to identify some of the federal government's most glaring problems and pledge to solve them through management reform. The PMA was introduced in 2002 and fo-

cused on five areas of management weakness across the government where the most progress could be made: human capital, competitive sourcing, financial performance, e-government, and budget and performance integration.

Under the guidance and leadership of Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration R. Allen Pittman, VA achieved "green" status on June 30 in the area of human capital. The Office of Management and Budget and the Office of

Personnel Management use a stop-light scoring system for rating federal agencies' progress in achieving milestones as outlined in the PMA. A rating of "red" indicates that the agency has not met any of the criteria; a rating of "yellow" indicates an agency has met some but not all of the criteria; and a rating of green indicates that the agency has met all of the criteria in order to successfully achieve the milestone. VA is the largest federal agency to attain "green" status in the area of human capital.



With employees in mind, VA sought out better management strategies that would align the needs of employees with the President's vision by incorporating these strategies into its Human Capital Plan. VA Secretary Jim Nicholson has said he considers employees "the foundation of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the key to our success."

VA was able to achieve "green" status in human capital by focusing on the areas of hiring timelines, competency gaps, performance management, leadership development, and accountability within Human Resources. These positive findings contributed to VA achieving a "green" rating.

For example, the average hiring time for General Schedule employees has been less than 45 days for four consecutive quarters. VA has realized a major accomplishment in its ability to reduce the time to hire a senior executive from more than 200 days in 2003 to less than 100 days as of March 31 of this year.

VA has also agreed to implement the USA Staffing system at VA Central Office and field facilities to modernize recruitment practices and to further streamline the hiring process. This user-friendly system uses Web-enabled software to automatically generate vacancy announcements; post announcements on USAJOBS; accept applications via the Internet, phone or fax; rate and rank job applicants; produce and update certificates; and notify applicants.

The department has closed vacancy gaps in more than 50 percent of its mission critical occupations—such as nurses, physicians and IT specialists—by recruiting and hiring personnel with these skill sets. Closing these vacancy gaps allows other VA employees who were previously shouldering additional duties and responsibilities created as a result of these staffing shortages to focus on their assigned duties and ultimately provide better service to veterans.

In the area of performance management, the test site provided performance plans with credible measures that were aligned with organizational goals. These measures demonstrated the linkage of the plans through all levels from network director to front-line employees. The Portland, Ore., VA Medical Center served as the test site.

VA established comprehensive leadership development programs to

The department was further challenged by the need to bring bargaining unit employees represented by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) to the multi-tiered performance management system. During this fiscal year, 100 percent of its bargaining unit employees were converted to the five-tier performance management system through the sup-



COURTESY OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

*Stephanie Lombardo, training officer with the National Cemetery Administration, gives a presentation on the "Face of HR" project at the recent national HR conference.*

ensure that newly selected leaders are ready to assume their new positions and execute their leadership duties from the very first day on the job. The VHA Mentor and Coach Program provides training to mentors, coaches and preceptors who work with new employees to show them the ropes and pass along corporate knowledge particular to VHA.

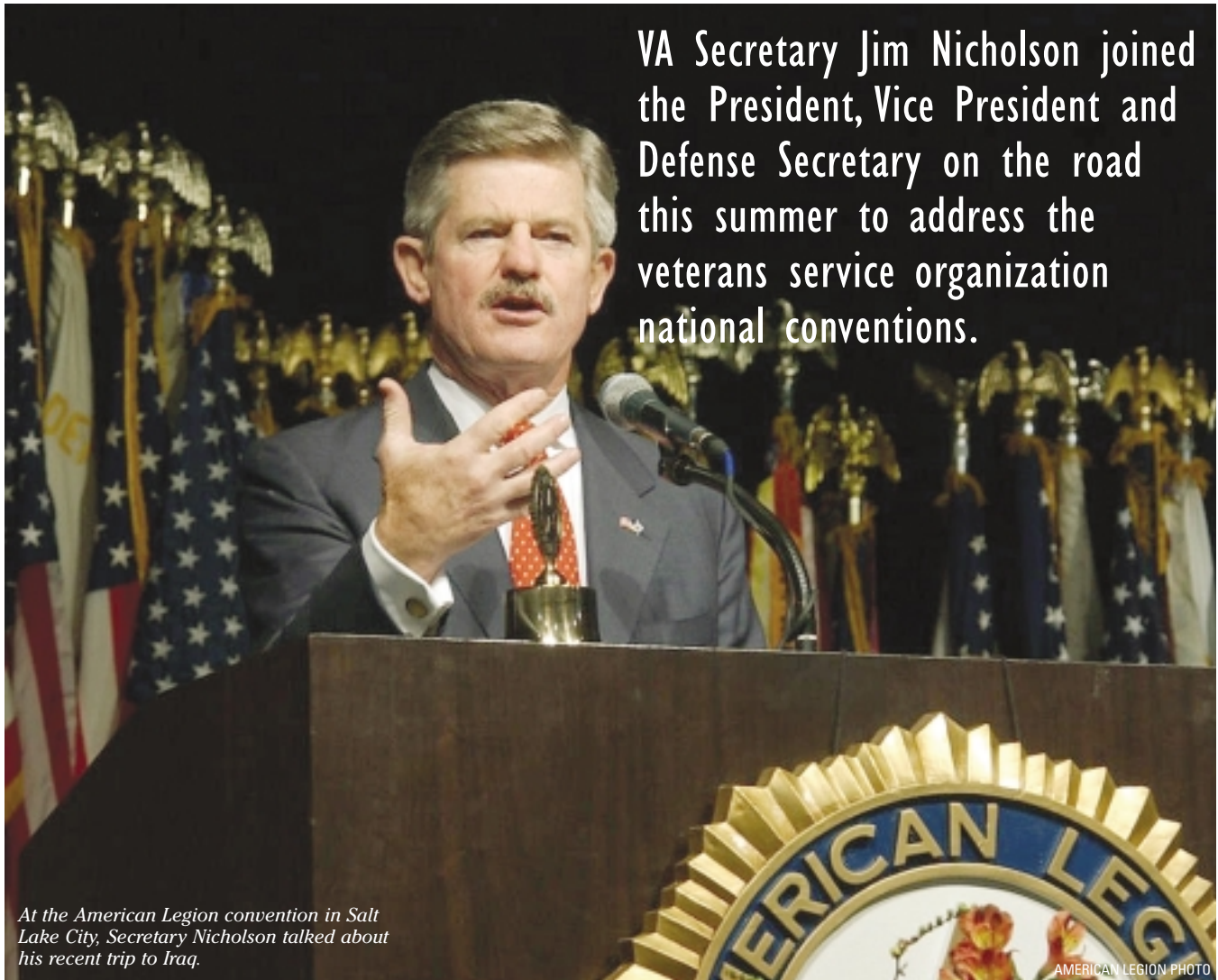
Another leadership program at VA is the Leadership Enhancement and Development (LEAD) program. The goal of the LEAD program is to identify candidates with leadership potential and to provide structured learning experiences for VA employees at grade levels GS-9 through GS-12.

port of AFGE and NAGE.

As the largest non-defense agency, with more than 235,000 employees, strategic management of human capital has become the way VA does business.

"VA should be very proud of this accomplishment," Pittman said. "This collaborative effort with OPM, and the vital contributions of the HR departments in VHA, VBA, and NCA as well as VA staff offices made reaching this milestone possible. This is proof that the power of One VA can produce awesome results for the benefit of its most important asset—its employee." VA

*By Sherrell Moore*



VA Secretary Jim Nicholson joined the President, Vice President and Defense Secretary on the road this summer to address the veterans service organization national conventions.

*At the American Legion convention in Salt Lake City, Secretary Nicholson talked about his recent trip to Iraq.*

AMERICAN LEGION PHOTO

# Making the Rounds

Secretary Jim Nicholson shared center stage with President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld this summer as he made the rounds of veterans service organization conventions.

Nicholson addressed the 107th Veterans of Foreign Wars Annual National Convention in Reno, Nev., on Aug. 29. He told the crowd that his attendance at the convention “reaffirms the fact that the VFW and VA

are bonded by a unity of mission, a commitment to service, and a dedication to veterans and their families.”

Providing an update on the state of VA, Nicholson said that “VA’s future is bright.” He said the department is moving forward to fulfill the President’s promise to honor our nation’s commitment to veterans.

The Secretary said VA’s first priority is providing care to service-connected disabled veterans, veterans with no health care options, and vet-

erans who need specialized services. Another major priority is looking out for the welfare of servicemembers returning from Southwest Asia, especially those veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Nicholson announced that President Bush recently signed an Executive Order to promote quality and efficient health care in federal government-administered and sponsored health care programs. As a result, VA

will be able to exchange clinical information with a veteran's non-VA health care provider. Private practice doctors will be able to provide higher quality and safer health care through the use of electronic health records, just as VA has done for veterans. For military retirees, VA will be able to exchange data with private doctors treating them under TRICARE.

"VA enthusiastically supports the President and will take all actions possible to implement the Executive Order, which will benefit veterans wherever they choose to receive health care," Nicholson said.

During his address to the VFW convention, Cheney noted that as part of the administration's "commitment to good and timely care for our veterans," the administration is modernizing and expanding many VA facilities, in addition to building brand new veterans' hospitals in Orlando, Denver and Las Vegas.

"By respecting and caring for our veterans, we show our values as a nation," Cheney said. "More than that, we honor solemn commitments that have been made to those who wore the uniform. A veteran who deals with the federal government should be treated as one who has paid into the system the hard way."

After being introduced to the crowd attending the VFW convention, Rumsfeld publicly thanked Nicholson "for all you do and all your department does for our veterans."

Nicholson and President Bush traveled to Salt Lake City to address the 88th American Legion Annual National Convention on Aug. 30 and Aug. 31.

Nicholson talked about his recent trip to Iraq with Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. The purpose

of their trip, the Secretary said, was to follow the path of treatment that soldiers fighting the global war on terrorism receive once wounded in battle. The pair traced that path from the battlefield to the field hospital to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and finally back to the United States.

"The speed with which our wounded troops are taken through the entire care network, from



*Outgoing American Legion National Commander Thomas L. Bock thanks Secretary Nicholson after his speech at the Legion convention on Aug. 30.*

AMERICAN LEGION PHOTO

Baghdad to Bethesda to VA, is just incredible," Nicholson said. "It is not unusual for a wounded soldier to get from a combat medic to an aid station to a combat support hospital to Walter Reed in 24 to 36 hours, and then to a VA Polytrauma Rehab Center in a matter of weeks."

Nicholson noted that this new generation of veterans has high expectations for health care services and is savvy about using information tech-

nology, such as the Internet, to educate themselves about existing resources and treatment choices that might be available to them. In response to the changing needs of this new generation of veterans, VA is enhancing rehabilitation care to include state-of-the-art equipment, modern technology, and advanced skills training techniques through VA's 21 Level II Polytrauma Network sites located throughout the country. The treatment goal of these Level II sites is to ensure that patients meet their highest potential for independent and productive lives.

"The bottom line I took away from my travel in Iraq is that, as far as VA is concerned, the young servicemen and women from OEF and OIF who are coming to us for follow-on care are making the transition with better outlooks for long-term recovery than ever before," Nicholson said.

During his address to the American Legion convention, President Bush thanked the veterans in attendance for stepping forward "when America needed you most." He pointed out that his 2007 budget provides more than \$80 billion for veterans, a 75 percent increase since he took office and the highest level of support for veterans in American history.

President Bush noted that for many veterans, health care is a top priority, and it is also a top priority of his administration. Once his 2007 budget is approved, he said, the administration will have increased the VA health care budget by 69 percent since 2001. In addition, treatment has been extended to a million additional veterans, including more than 300,000 men and women returning from fighting the global war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. VA

By Renee McElween

# Illustrating Veterans Day

Poster designer honed his artistic skills through VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program.

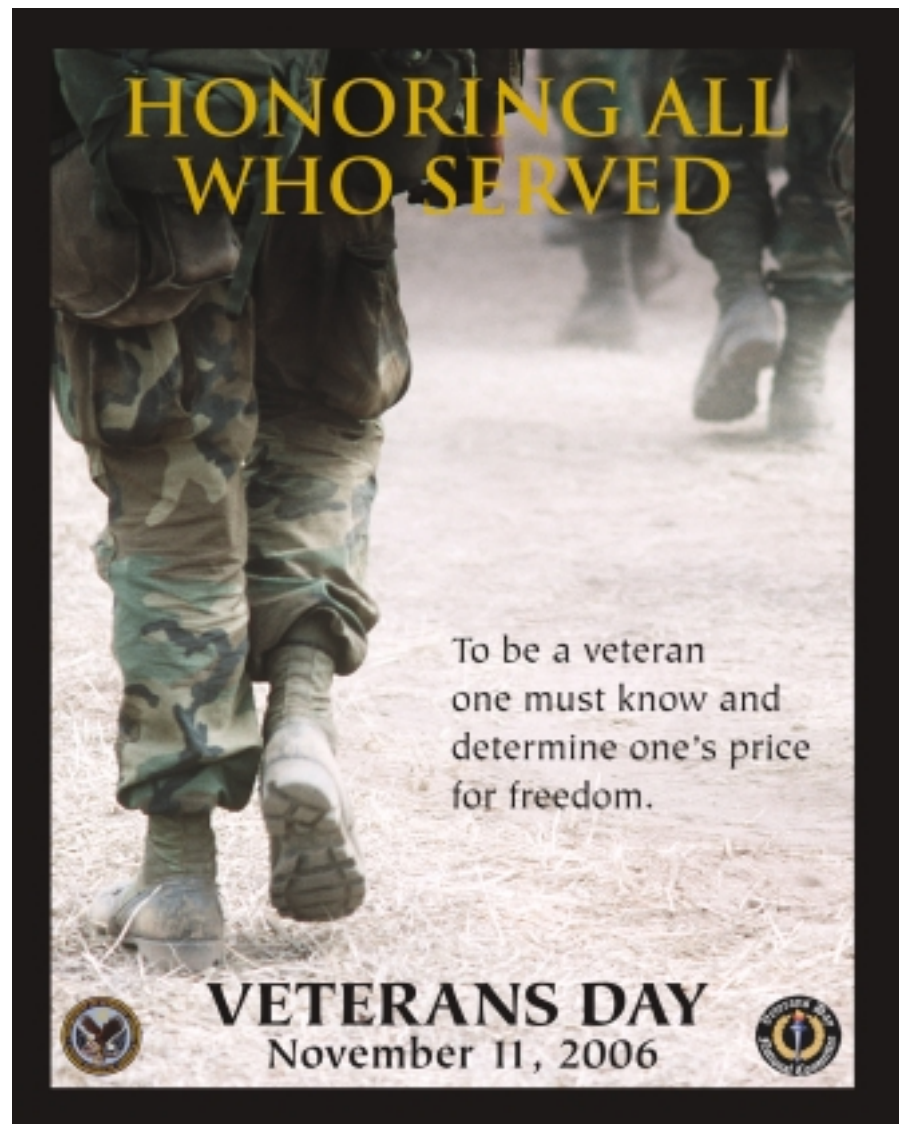
**N**early 100,000 service-disabled veterans call on VA each year for assistance in preparing for the world of work, finding and keeping fulfilling jobs and maximizing their independence. One of them combined his memories of the military with artistic skills honed through the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program and created a work of art that will symbolize Veterans Day across the country this year.

Eric Burg, a 100 percent service-disabled veteran who served in both the Air Force and Army Reserve, designed the national Veterans Day 2006 poster distributed by the Veterans Day National Committee to military installations and veterans facili-

ties throughout the country and distributed directly to more than 150,000 schools. Burg's work will be

on the front cover of the printed program President Bush will hold as he officiates the national Veterans Day

*Eric Burg, a 100 percent service-disabled veteran, and the national Veterans Day 2006 poster he designed.*



ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

The poster depicts soldiers' boots and legs marching down a dusty trail. That image had many meanings for 39-year-old Burg, who was left disabled after a military accident and later spent time homeless on the streets of Syracuse, N.Y.

"It really captured what our veterans have gone through to achieve the dream of freedom that we all enjoy," he said. "It reminded me of my military days, marching in the dirt, the ruggedness and the harshness of what military members have to go through every day."

After losing his home and having nowhere else to go, Burg found his way to the Syracuse VA Medical Center. With VA help, he was placed temporarily at a downtown mission, started receiving disability payments and eventually found an apartment.

He was inspired to pursue art when a man he knew offered to buy some of his drawings. "I decided then and there to go back to school to do something I loved," he said.

The VR&E program made that possible. Today's program offers qualified veterans a new "Five Track" employment process, which, says VR&E Service Director Judy Caden, "puts veterans right where they want to be—in the career decision driver's seat."

VR&E offers five employment options to disabled veterans: re-employment with a former employer for those coming off active military duty; rapid employment access for those with reasonably developed skills and education that support quick entry into the job market; long-term services for veterans requiring formal

education and experience in new careers; self-employment for more seriously disabled veterans seeking career flexibility; and independent living for veterans unable to immediately pursue employment goals but seeking services that increase their independence in daily living as they establish employment goals.

Working with St. Louis VA Regional Office VR&E counselor David Allen, Burg recently earned his bachelor's degree in media communications through the program and since January has participated in a federal non-paid work experience program in graphic arts at the St. Louis office of the Employee Education System. That's where he heard about the search for a 2006 Veterans Day poster. He credits the program's flexibility and responsiveness to both a veteran's disability and career goals with his success in entering a new field.



"Without VA I don't know where I'd be right now," he said. "Winning the poster competition showed me that I have the talent to do great things."

Helping disabled veterans discover and make the most of their talents in the world of work is VR&E's goal. It's a big job that is getting bigger as veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq return home to resume old lives or build new ones.

VA projects the VR&E workload will grow steadily over the next few years, increasing by 2.75 percent this year to just over 100,000 participants and by 2.5 percent in 2007. That growth is being driven by the expansion of outreach activities—particularly to returning veterans—and the success of the Five Track employment process.

New, streamlined services buttressed by online employment technology, job resource labs and new staff positions dedicated to service delivery promise to keep VR&E and the veterans it serves on track. The cornerstone of this effort is VR&E's employment Web site VetsSuccess.gov ([www.vetsuccess.gov](http://www.vetsuccess.gov)), which enables disabled veterans to explore all the programs and benefits offered through VR&E, apply for them online, and link to expert vocational resources, labor market information and career development tools. The Web site features a working partnerships link integrating VR&E support with employers, the Department of Labor jobs program for veterans, and faith-based and community organizations.

To download a print-quality version of one very meaningful product of Eric Burg's VR&E experience, go to the VA Veterans Day Web site at [www.va.gov/vetsday](http://www.va.gov/vetsday). VA

# Still Going Strong

105-year-old Robley Rex is a familiar sight at the Louisville, Ky., VA Medical Center, where he's volunteered faithfully three days a week for the past 20 years.

**The year: 1919**

**The place: an Army post in Andernach, Germany**

**The name: "Kid Rex"**

Eighty-seven years ago, Robley Rex was an 18-year-old Army private serving overseas as a clerk in a Military Intelligence unit for 3rd Army Headquarters. At 5-foot-6, Rex weighed just 115 pounds. His small stature and slight features brought him to the attention of his regimental boxing instructor, who recruited him to box in exhibitions as a flyweight.

"I put on a good show," Rex recalled. His ring name was "Kid Rex."

He traveled around Germany and France boxing against other soldiers from the French and British armies in exhibition matches. The matches were a form of entertainment for the troops serving in Europe at the time.

Rex admits that he was recruited more for his ability to meet his weight class than for his boxing ability. He said everyone else in his unit weighed anywhere from 130 to 250 pounds, nowhere near the 113- to 115-pound flyweight limit.

Asked to recount his win-loss record, Rex sheepishly admitted, "I lost more than I won."

Rex said he would box in as many as three exhibition matches in a single day. The boxers would load up into a truck, unload, box their matches, then load back up into the truck to travel to the next match and repeat the process all over again.

"It was the height of stupidity to have that many matches in one day," he said, shaking his head and grinning. His body took quite a beating, but "Kid Rex" was young and anxious to do his part to boost the morale of his fellow troops. Besides, part of the reason he joined the Army was to travel and see the world.

"I never had been over 10 miles from home in my life," Rex said. He was born May 2, 1901, in Hopkinsville, Ky.

**The year: 2006**

**The place: Louisville, Ky., VA Medical Center**

**The name: Rex**

Today, Robley Rex is a 105-year-old Army veteran serving as a volunteer at the Louisville VA Medical Center. Weighing in at 131 pounds, he'd have to move up to the lightweight class if he were still boxing for the Army. He no longer goes by the ring name "Kid Rex." These days, he's known simply as "Rex."

Rex is a familiar sight to patients and staff at the facility. He has been volunteering there faithfully three days a week since 1986. Wearing white slacks, a white, short-sleeved shirt, a navy blue bow tie, white tennis shoes, and a white baseball cap, he lifts one hand from his walker in greeting to people he passes as he scurries down the hallways, making his rounds.

He has logged 14,432 hours as a volunteer as of August, according to MaryJane Crowder, chief of Voluntary Service for the Louisville VA Medical Center. Although Rex is not the longest-serving volunteer at the facility, Crowder said he is definitely the oldest active volunteer and serves as an inspiration to his fellow veterans who are patients there.

"They see Rex and see what he represents for their own futures and he perks everybody up," she explained.

Not only is Rex the oldest active volunteer at the Louisville medical center, he has the distinction of being the oldest active volunteer among 95,000 volunteers across all of VA, according to Voluntary Service records in headquarters.

"To the best of our knowledge, he is our oldest active volunteer," said Laura Balun, director of the Voluntary Service Office.

Rex no longer entertains the troops by wearing down his opponents with fancy footwork or delivering knockout punches in a boxing ring. Instead, his volunteer duties consist of delivering patient charts and paperwork, dropping off X-rays, and visiting with patients on the wards.

He said he decided to start volunteering at the facility 20 years ago, at age 85, because it just seemed like the thing he wanted to do.

"I'm just happy when I'm working here," he said. "I try to be cheerful and I try to make veterans feel like we are here to help them."

Nyoka Emily, R.N., an occupational health nurse at the Louisville VA Medical Center, has known Rex since 1993 and considers him one of her best friends. Her duties entail looking after the health of the 1,149 employees on staff as well as the volunteers. Rex stops by her office while making his rounds so she can monitor his blood pressure.

Emily says she enjoys spending her lunch breaks talking with him and hearing his stories about his time in the Army and other life experiences, such as living through the 1937 Louisville flood. She claims Rex "has an opinion on everything" and she doesn't run into many people with his level of insight.

As a nurse, Emily attributes his longevity to his laid-back approach to life.

"He's good to people," she said. "He has done a lot of good for people and never expected anything in return."

Rex says he has lived a long life because he married the right woman. He and Grace Bivins were married for 69 years before she died at age 91 in 1992. The couple met at Camp Taylor in Louisville in 1919 before he was shipped to Europe to serve in the Army. Bivins was a piano player, entertaining the troops. When Rex returned from his tour of duty in 1922, the couple got married in her hometown of Owensboro, Ky.

"She made sure that my life was a joy," Rex said.

His other secret for a long life is simply how he has chosen to live his life.

"I don't consume alcohol and I don't smoke," he said. "My life has been mostly one of moderation."

If Rex has one downfall, it would have to be his sweet tooth, Emily

said. She has been baking him homemade pies since his wife died. Emily said she brings in an apple, peach, cherry or pecan pie for him on Friday and on Monday he brings her pie plate back.

Rex said her pecan pie is his all-time favorite.

"If they was any better I would just roll over and play dead," he said of her pies.

Rex lives on his own in Okolona, Ky., which is about 15 miles from the Louisville VA Medical Center. Since he no longer drives, Rex relies on fellow veteran and volunteer Robert Keller to pick him up at his house and drive him to the center to perform his volunteer duties. Keller has been driving Rex since 2003. He says



COURTESY ROBLEY REX



RENEE MCELVEEN

*Left: At age 105, Robley Rex has the distinction of being the oldest active volunteer among 95,000 volunteers across the entire department; above: Rex as a young Army private somewhere in France around 1919.*

driving Rex to the center, he drives him to veterans' dinners and public appearances where Rex is received as a local celebrity because of his age and military service.

"He's wearing me out," said the 59-year-old Keller, who is a veteran of the Vietnam War. He served in the Marine Corps from 1967 to 1970 with the 3rd Marine Division. Today Keller is president of Chapter 454 of the Vietnam Veterans of America. He invites Rex to attend his chapter breakfast meetings every month as his special guest.

Keller said that patients and staff look forward to seeing Rex around the facility each week because of his positive attitude and high energy level.

"He provides a morale booster for all the veterans," Keller said. **VA**

By Renee McElveen

the pair has logged more than 150,000 miles and 300 visits in the past three years.

"I'm his social secretary, basically," Keller joked. In addition to

# Finding Inspiration Close to Home

Growing up in Wisconsin, Tomah VAMC's Carla Loging always wondered why her father became so melancholy during the Christmas season. A lockbox discovered after his death would finally reveal the chilling reason.

A family history of military service and personal sacrifice inspired Carla Loging to join VA 23 years ago. Loging's late father, Robert W. Crawford, spent five months as a prisoner of war in four different German stalags during World War II.

"Knowing my father was a POW and how he served our country, it is an honor to be working at a facility taking care of our nation's heroes," she said. "My father gave to our country—now I can carry on by serving veterans."

Loging, executive assistant to the director of the Tomah, Wis., VA Medical Center, believes that being the daughter of a former POW has given her more compassion for veterans. She says she always tries to brighten the day of the patients she sees every day by smiling and saying a few words to them.

While growing up in New Lisbon, Wis., Loging knew her father had been a POW, but he rarely shared any details about his war experiences while he was alive. The only thing

she knew was that he was captured during the Battle of the Bulge and was held prisoner in Germany from December 1944 to April 1945.

She recalls her father being "exceptionally quiet" throughout the holiday season each year. On Christmas Eve he would become teary-eyed during the candlelight service at

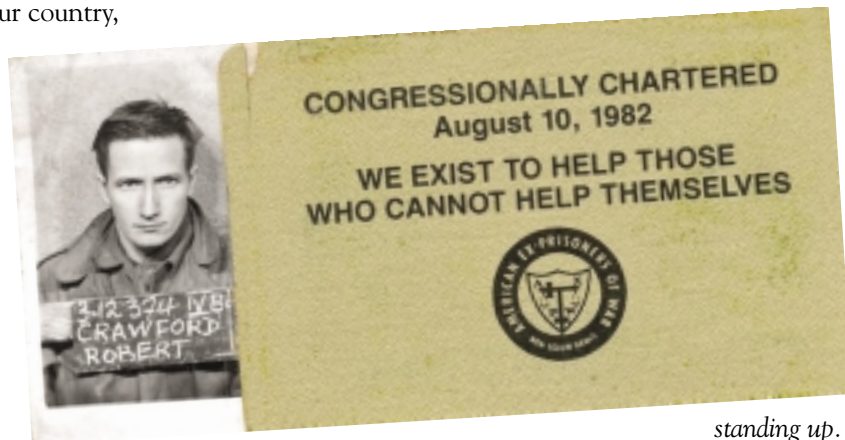
helping their mother, Elva Crawford, go through his things when they found a lockbox in the bedroom closet. The lockbox revealed the details of Air Force Technician Fifth Grade Robert W. Crawford's experiences as a POW.

*"December 23, 1944, we arrived at Stalag 12A, we were bombed that afternoon, and eight killed. They loaded us in box cars to move us to Stalag 4-B because of the bombing there was no place to stay at 12-A. By now there were about 300 of us. They put 60 men to a box car, wired the doors shut. Not enough room to lay or sit down, you slept*

*standing up.*

*"December 24, 1944 we were parked in a railroad yard in Berlin when American bombers bombed us.\* While we were being bombed everyone sang 'Silent Night' as it was Christmas Eve. Thank God the bombers were not that accurate." — excerpts from Crawford's journal (\*Editor's note: American pilots were unaware that the boxcars contained American POWs.)*

In addition to her father's journal, the lockbox contained a number of



their church, especially when the candles were lit and the congregation sang "Silent Night." Loging didn't understand why this made him emotional; he never explained it, and her mother protected his privacy.

It wasn't until after his death at the age of 80 on March 6, 2003, that she finally learned why Christmas Eve triggered such strong emotions in her father. Loging and her brother, Gary Crawford, a Vietnam veteran, were



other items allowing the family to piece together his ordeal. There were three Western Union telegrams addressed to Crawford's mother, Mrs. Senith K. Crawford, of Camp Douglas, Wis. A telegram dated Jan. 12, 1945, was sent on behalf of the Secretary of War "to express his deep regret that your son Technician Fifth Grade Robert W. Crawford has been reported missing in action since twenty-one December in Germany." Good news was contained in the telegram dated June 2, 1945—her son was returned to military control on May 10, 1945. The third telegram, dated June 4, 1945, contained even better news: "Your son T/5 Crawford Robert W is being returned to the United States within the near future and will be given an opportunity to communicate with you upon arrival."

A map of Germany illustrating the wide dispersal of stalags throughout the country during World War II showed four circled in black ink. A handwritten timeline allowed the family to trace his movement from stalag to stalag, by boxcar or on foot, during his five months in captivity:

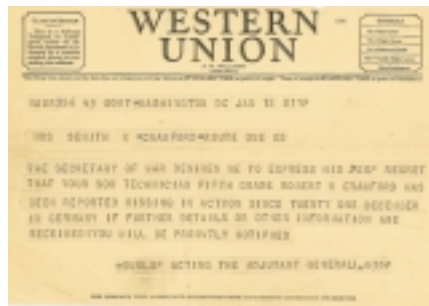
- Dec. 19, 1944 – captured near Auel, Germany
- Dec. 20, 1944 – hiked 40 miles Koln, Germany
- Dec. 23, 1944 – bombed at Stalag 12-A, 8 killed
- Dec. 31, 1944 – arrived Stalag 4B
- Jan. 8, 1945 – left 4B
- Jan. 10, 1945 – arrived 3B, arrived in Luxembourg
- Jan. 31, 1945 – left 3B for 3A hiked 150 miles
- Feb. 13, 1945 – arrived at 3A. Moved into tents.
- March 7, 1945 – 1st Army crossed Rhine at Cologne
- April 22, 1945 – liberated at 3A by Russians near Luckenwalde"

In his journal, Crawford wrote that the prisoners were transferred from Stalag 3B because the Russians were making a big push into East Germany. As a result, the prisoners were forced to hike for 14 days to reach

Stalag 3A, a distance of about 150 miles.

"Our food was raw turnips growing near the road. Some nights you stayed in barns or a fenced yard. If you could not make it and dropped out, the Germans would shoot you and leave you there. Our guards were Hitler Youth who had been taught military since the first grade. Most of them were 16 and 17-year-old boys." – excerpt from Crawford's journal

Loding said her father normally



weighed about 146 pounds. At the time of his liberation from Stalag 3A, he weighed 87 pounds. The one thing she remembers her father revealing about his captivity was how little the prisoners were fed.

"Every day your meal for the day was a slice of bread made of potato peelings and sawdust and a bowl of dehy-

drated rutabagas. You slept with your shoes and all your clothes on to keep warm. We did not have a bath, wash, or shave for five months. In that time you wore the same clothes 24 hours a day. We were a good looking, sweet smelling, lousy bunch of guys." – excerpt from Crawford's journal

As Loding goes about her business at the Tomah VAMC, she worries about the veterans who are patients there. She looks into their eyes and behind their smiles, and wonders



Opposite: Robert Crawford's POW charter ID card for his lifetime membership in the American Ex-Prisoners of War; top left: One of three telegrams sent to Crawford's mother during his captivity; left: Carla Loding works as executive assistant to Stan Johnson, director of the Tomah, Wis., VA Medical Center; above: Robert and Elva Crawford on their wedding day in 1945.

what they saw while serving their country. Loding says she takes a great deal of pride in working for VA. "Every day I remind myself that all of us at our facility, no matter what we do in our positions, we are doing it for someone's father, mother, sister, or brother who gave to our country." VA

By Renee McElveen

# Pandemic Flu: What VA is Doing to Prepare

**T**here's a great deal of activity going on in the world, the country, states, communities, and VA at all levels to be prepared for a natural disaster that everyone hopes will never occur: pandemic influenza. This is a form of influenza that is different from the "flu" that we largely prevent by vaccination each year. It would be an influenza virus entirely new to humans to which we would have little natural protection or immunity, that could be transmitted very easily from person to person, and against which we would not have a vaccine for many months.

Pandemics occur a few times each century—with an infamously virulent one starting in 1918 and moderate

■ Waves of illness will last six to eight weeks in a given community; several waves might occur.

■ In the worst case (as it was in 1918), a pandemic will lead to widespread illness, deaths and massive societal disruption.

■ Vaccine and antiviral drugs will be scarce at the start of a pandemic, possibly later as well, as will other medications, supplies and equipment.

VA has been concerned about pandemic flu and similar emerging respiratory illnesses for the past few years, and as a result took some important early steps. The department already has well-established emergency management and continuity of operations plans for a host of natural

***"If it happens anywhere in our nation, veterans will be affected, and VA facilities will respond."***

ones beginning in 1957 and 1968. Experts are all but certain that we are due for another, but they can't predict when or how harsh it might be. The U.S. government, in the words of Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt, is asking people to "Prepare for the worst. Hope for the best," and to "Get informed. Be prepared." Federal government planning assumptions—also being used by VA—include:

■ About one-third of the population will be ill.

■ About half of those who become ill will seek health care.

■ Absenteeism will be 40 percent at peak.

and manmade hazards. VA also has a successful, well-orchestrated annual vaccination program against seasonal flu.

In the fall of 2004, VA purchased a stockpile of the antiviral drug oseltamivir that is known to be effective against a strain of influenza that may become problematic. Around that same time, the department launched the public health campaign "Infection: Don't Pass It On," which works to engage patients, visitors and staff in hand washing, respiratory etiquette, and other basic measures important to preventing the transmission of infection.

In November 2005, President

## Seasonal Flu Vaccination More Important Than Ever

The 2006-2007 flu vaccine is here. With the threat of pandemic flu looming, vaccination against "regular" or "seasonal" flu is more important than ever to prevent respiratory disease in veterans and staff. According to vaccination expert Dr. Kristin Nichol, of the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, "Influenza each year is responsible for tens of millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, tens of thousands of deaths and billions of dollars in health care costs."

The elderly and others with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk for the serious complications of influenza that might result in hospitalization or death. Says Dr. Nichol, "Many of the veterans we serve fall into one of these categories." A continued emphasis on vaccination of health care workers is important, she says, especially because they can transmit flu to patients and others and because having flu prevents them from working.

**VA flu vaccination rates: unequaled but room for improvement**

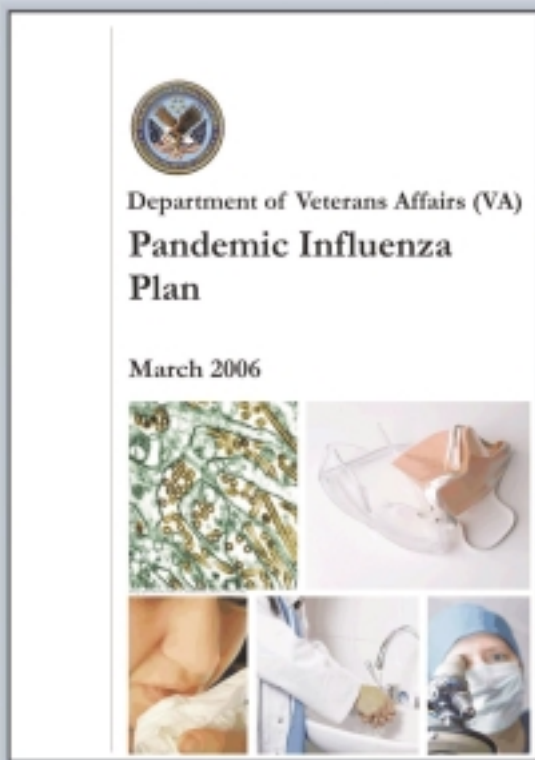
How do VA flu vaccination rates compare? The department has established a seasonal flu vaccination program that is unequaled in effectiveness by any other public or private integrated health care system. The program has been particularly successful with patients: In the 2004-2005 season, for example, self-report surveys showed vaccination rates of 88 percent in VA patients 65 and older versus 63 percent of U.S. adults in general in that age range.

*(continued on page 20)*



COURTESY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE

*Left: An emergency hospital at Camp Funston, Kansas, believed to be the site of the first wave of the 1918 pandemic. The virus eventually killed tens of millions of people; below: VA's pandemic flu plan has been held up as a model for other agencies to follow.*



Bush announced a National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza and called upon all federal agencies to create plans that are operational, and that protect employees, maintain continuity of operations, communicate with stakeholders, and support U.S. government efforts. A multidisciplinary group of more than 70 staff from across VA health, benefits and memorial affairs answered the President's charge, creating a VA-wide Pandemic Influenza Plan that provides a de-

tailed guide to preparing for a pandemic at the national, network and facility levels, to responding to a pandemic should it occur, and to recovering from a pandemic.

VA's plan met the original late March deadline. It has been held up as a model for other agencies to follow. It has also provided a framework for planning across the department and all three administrations, with health system network offices and medical facilities required to submit their plans by last June. The plan is on the VA Intranet at [vaww1.va.gov/vhaethics/pandemic\\_influenza.cfm](http://vaww1.va.gov/vhaethics/pandemic_influenza.cfm).

Other ways VA is preparing for pandemic

flu include:

- Providing additional support to the VA health care system as well as benefits and memorial affairs to enable more detailed preparation and collaborative planning with community organizations.
- Developing an electronic health care-associated infection and influenza surveillance system. Such a system would obtain real-time information from VA's electronic medical records to be an early warning system

if influxes of influenza patients occur around the system.

- Obtaining more antiviral drug as well as personal protective equipment.
- Developing educational materials for veterans/general audiences and for health care staff in both print and video formats.
- Carrying out tabletop exercises to test and improve VA plans.

VA is working with federal and state partners and across the department to develop ways to coordinate, share information, communicate and educate. Two-way communication is important at all levels. This is at the heart of another VA pandemic flu initiative led by the National Center for Ethics in Health Care—health care staff discussion forums entitled “Tough Decisions” concerning the difficult issues that will face all of us if a pandemic comes to pass. This material is located on the Intranet at [vaww1.va.gov/vhaethics/pandemic\\_influenza.cfm](http://vaww1.va.gov/vhaethics/pandemic_influenza.cfm).

At the end of last year, Dr. Lawrence Deyton, chief officer for Public Health and Environmental Hazards, whose office led the development of the VA Pandemic Influenza Plan, testified on VA preparedness for pandemic flu before a subcommittee of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. “Because veterans and VA health care facilities are located in nearly every community in the nation, we liken VA to a fine-meshed sieve when it comes to infectious diseases and public health threats [including pandemic flu]” he said. “If it happens anywhere in our nation, veterans will be affected, and VA facilities will respond.”

VA pandemic flu information appears on the Internet at [www.publichealth.va.gov/flu](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu).

For more information on what you can do and for the latest information, visit [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

VA

By Connie Raab

### Seasonal flu vaccination continued from page 18

VA flu vaccination rates for health care staff are above the national average. However, in the U.S. only about 40 percent of health workers get vaccinated. VA's first survey of employee rates last year showed that almost 53 percent received an influenza vaccination.

Improvement in employee vaccination remains a top goal. Vaccination is essential in keeping the workforce healthy and able to take care of veterans and prevent transmission of influenza to patients, other staff members, families and communities. In fact, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) has approved a new infection control standard that requires organizations to offer flu vaccination to staff and licensed independent practitioners in hospitals and long-term care, effective Jan. 1, 2007.

VA already meets JCAHO requirements. These include providing flu vaccination to health care staff on site; educating staff about vaccination, non-vaccine control measures, and the diagnosis, transmission and impact of flu; evaluating vaccination rates and reasons for staff not getting vaccinated; and implementing enhancements to improve rates.

#### Facts about flu vaccination

Among other reasons, several misconceptions keep people from getting their annual flu vaccination. The myths—and the facts—include:

■ *"I'm healthy. I don't need to get a flu shot."* Actually, flu can cause serious illness and death even in young, healthy people. It's not just a disease that affects the elderly.

■ *"I don't want to get the vaccine because it has side effects."* Studies have shown that the flu vaccine is *not* associated with higher rates of systemic symptoms than are seen with injections of placebos among healthy working adults. The most common side effect of flu vaccination via a shot is soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site for a day or two. The most common side effects from the

nasal form of flu vaccine are a runny nose and nasal congestion.

■ *"I got the flu vaccine before and I still got the flu, so why should I get it now?"* The vaccine isn't perfect, but in years when there is a good match between the circulating viruses and the corresponding vaccine strains, vaccine efficacy for reducing illness has generally been between 70 and 90 percent in healthy adults.

#### Tools and tips to support an annual program

Again this year, updated VA Influenza Toolkits have been sent to VA medical facilities and posted on the Internet. The program is promoted to key contacts, including "flu" coordinators, occupational health clinicians, and infection control professionals, as well as prevention managers, patient educators, education contacts, patient safety staff and public affairs officers.

The toolkits include a manual of clinical and practical information, as well as posters, buttons and stickers. Each year the national VA team that runs the program looks at both the medical literature and toolkit evaluation results to make improvements to the materials. A well-received innovation from last year is also being continued—the eight groups will be e-



New to this year's flu toolkit, this poster is designed to encourage health care staff to get vaccinated.

mailed a "VA Flu Campaign Tip of the Week" from September to March (flu season) to provide ideas and updates and keep momentum going. As new information and policies emerge, "Influenza Advisories" are also sent to a wide clinical audience.

Here's a final tip for *Vanguard* readers throughout the country: Get your flu vaccination! Encourage co-workers, veterans, and others who are eligible to do so. It's one of the most effective ways there is to prevent illness.

For more information, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/flu](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu) on the Internet and [vwww.vhaco.va.gov/phshcg/Flu/index.htm](http://vwww.vhaco.va.gov/phshcg/Flu/index.htm) on the Intranet. - By Connie Raab

# True Warrior

Sometimes Texas Rangers coach Bobby Jones can't quite believe his luck to have survived a war and achieved his Major League dreams.

It was a gloomy, overcast day in Washington, D.C., in 1994, and Texas Rangers coach Bobby Jones had come to the nation's capital to visit one of the city's most popular memorials. He had wanted to see this much talked about memorial since it opened in 1982, but feared that seeing it in person would bring some unpleasant flashbacks.

As he neared the black V-shaped granite memorial, Jones hesitated. This was not going to be easy. He took a detour and circled the block instead. He circled the block a second time. He thought about his time spent halfway around the world in the jungles of a small country in Southeast Asia decades earlier when he was just 20 years old. The memories were still fresh and painful.

On his third approach to the memorial, he decided there was no turning back now. He had come this far. With a strong will and a determination that is characteristic of him, Jones made his way to the memorial on whose walls are inscribed more than 58,000 names.

Arriving at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the former Army corporal stood silently before The Wall. It had been a difficult journey, but Jones was glad to finally be there to honor his fallen comrades.

Tears formed in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks as he ran his hand across the cool granite wall touching the names of his comrades in arms killed in the Vietnam War. It was Jones' way of letting his buddies know that he has not forgotten them. He had come to pay tribute to them and let them know he remembers their service and ultimate sacrifice.

Looking at all the names on that wall, Jones couldn't help but think, "There but for the grace of God, my name would be inscribed too." It's a thought that makes him shudder.

Jones returned to The Wall with his wife Debbie and with family and friends who have come to appreciate and better understand his emotions about the war.

A star high school baseball player in his native



An Army veteran of Vietnam, Bobby Jones is the first base coach for the Texas Rangers.

TEXAS RANGERS PHOTO

Elkton, Md., Jones was drafted by the Washington Senators in 1967. Two years later he was drafted again—this time by Uncle Sam. He went from the ball field to the battlefield, exchanging his baseball uniform for camouflage fatigues.

Looking back, Jones believes being drafted by the Army was actually good for him. He credits his military service with jump-starting his baseball career.

"I was playing Low-A ball, and my chances of reaching the majors were slim," Jones said. "I was just going through the motions."

So when he received the notice from his local draft board to report for induction into the U.S. Armed Forces, Jones was ready to go and fulfill his patriotic duty just as his father and grandfather had before him.

He served 14 months—from December 1969 to February 1971—in Vietnam, where he was section chief in a

105-millimeter howitzer group, providing fire support for American infantrymen. As section chief, Jones was in charge of a crew of about eight men, which consisted of gunners, assistant gunners, loaders and ammo bearers. They were referred to as “gun bunnies” because of the hopping they had to do back and forth over the split trails of the howitzer during firing.

It was hazardous and difficult duty, requiring Jones and his fellow soldiers to be on constant guard, not knowing when the enemy would strike. He recalls numerous sleepless nights spent in bunkers and foxholes when enemy mortar rounds would shatter the night’s silence and light up



COURTESY BOBBY JONES



BRUCE MORRIS

the sky. There were some close calls, and Jones said he had good friends who were seriously wounded and some were killed.

Although Jones escaped serious injury in Vietnam, he did not leave the country unscathed. He lost hearing in his right ear and still suffers from tinnitus brought about by the constant barrage of the blaring, thunderous sounds of artillery fire. For his service in the Vietnam conflict, Jones received the Bronze Star in addition to the Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal.

It was while he was in Vietnam that Jones began to really miss baseball. He had grown up playing the game and was disappointed he had not reached the majors. He vowed that once he left the Army he would resume his baseball dream of making it to the big leagues.

“I came back stronger and with more desire to play,” said Jones. “If it hadn’t been for my military service, I probably would not have ever played in the big leagues.”

Jones used the discipline, determination and courage he mastered

*Left: Jones, right, with Rangers pitchers Kameron Loe, left, and Brian Shouse, visited patients at the Dallas VA Medical Center, including Herman Brown, earlier this year; above: Jones served 14 months in Vietnam with a 105-millimeter howitzer group.*

while in the Army to achieve his goal.

He made his Major League debut in 1974 and played in the big leagues for parts of nine seasons—seven with the Rangers and two with the Angels—as an outfielder. He holds the Rangers career record with 42 pinch-hit appearances.

Following his playing career, the Rangers, recognizing the leadership skills that Jones acquired in the Army, hired him to manage their minor clubs. He guided the team’s Single-A affiliate in Charlotte and later led their Double-A club in Tulsa as well as their Triple-A squad in Oklahoma City.

In his more than 16 seasons as a Rangers minor league manager, he earned a 1,139-1,134 record, the most games and victories in organization history, advancing his teams to the playoffs in five of his last six seasons as manager. And again, Jones credits his military experience for his achievements.

“Being in the military gave me the discipline and desire to succeed.

Those same traits are what I now try to pass on to the players,” Jones said. He also tells them to have fun. “Go out and play the game, and give it all you’ve got, but remember, it’s just a game—it’s not a life or death situation.”

This year marks Jones’ 19th season as a coach or manager in the Texas organization. He returns to the Major League club after serving in that capacity for the 2000 and 2001 seasons under former manager Johnny Oates.

“I’m excited about it,” said Jones, who managed many of the Rangers’ current players in minors. “It’s great watching them develop and seeing them get to the big leagues.”

Jones, who is coaching first base and working with the team’s outfielders, said he is learning from manager Buck Showalter just like he did from Oates, observing how he manages and handles some of the game situations.

But no one admires Jones’ military service more than Showalter, himself the son of a World War II veteran.

“It’s a privilege to be around

someone like Bobby. He’s been a loyal guy in a lot of ways, not only to the Rangers but more importantly to his country,” said Showalter. “We’re real proud of him. He’s a great baseball man and a great leader of men.”

Showalter attributes his first base coach’s leadership skills to Jones’ military service. “I think you attribute a lot of things that he’s been a part of in his life to the man he’s become. He’s been exposed to a lot of things in life that allow him to keep a real reality on what we’re doing.”

While Jones doesn’t talk much about his military service, Showalter says he does the talking for him, ensuring that players know they have a true warrior on the team.

Rangers players who played for Jones in the minor leagues speak highly of his leadership and managerial skills and admire and appreciate what Jones has done. “He’s a tremendous guy to play for and a superb individual,” said Rangers catcher Gerald Laird. “I admire everything about him, and what he’s been through, and where he is now.”

According to Major League Base-

ball, Jones is one of less than a dozen Major League players who served in the military during the Vietnam era. Among them is former Texas Rangers pitcher Jim Bibby, who was the first Ranger to throw a no-hitter.

Nowadays, Jones makes every effort to meet and greet U.S. servicemen and women when he sees them at the airport or at the ballpark.

“I think it’s great the way the country is expressing their appreciation and support of our troops,” he said. “It didn’t happen to us. When we came back, it was completely different.”

Earlier this year, Jones and a few Rangers players visited with veterans at the Dallas VA Medical Center.

“We went and asked them how they were doing and thanked them for their service to our country,” said Jones, who recently was fitted with a new hearing aid at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. “We talked baseball and shared some stories. They appreciated us coming. The VA has been good to me. They’ve treated me very well.”

“Visits by Rangers such as Bobby Jones are extremely uplifting for our veterans,” said Eric Jacobsen, assistant director of the VA North Texas Health Care System in Dallas. “It takes a special person to take time out of their busy life to come to the VA and spend quality time with hospitalized veterans. You can see it in the veterans’ eyes and demeanor that they are appreciative.”

And Jones remains appreciative of the way his life has turned out. He sees himself as a very fortunate man.

“I’ve been with the Senators/Rangers organizations for 35 years,” he said. “I cannot believe how lucky I’ve been to have survived a war and to wake up every morning to go to work at a job that I love.” **VA**

By Ozzie Garza

**Editor’s note:** This article was originally published in the game program of the Texas Rangers.

## Major League Salute to Veterans

Over the Fourth of July weekend and throughout the remainder of the 2006 season, Major League Baseball players, managers and coaches visited patients at their local VA hospitals. The visits were part of the *Major League Baseball Salutes America* campaign launched in conjunction with VA and the Department of Defense’s *America Supports You* program.

In addition to hospital visits, ball clubs also presented a variety of pre-game on-field and in-game activities designed to celebrate the Fourth of July holiday, including flyovers, color guards, special renditions of the National Anthem, and first pitch ceremonies. All clubs that hosted a July 4 home game were provided with taped greetings from Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig and President Bush thanking the Armed Forces for their service and video spots from VA and the *America*

*Supports You* program. During the seventh inning, a PA announcement ran acknowledging and thanking active-duty military and veterans for their service.



MERCI DEL TORO

Florida Marlins players Chris Resop, Mike Jacobs and Logan Kensing (left to right) visit patient Albert Hawkins at the Miami VAMC this summer.

# Preserving Their Memories for Future Generations

The Veterans History Project seeks to capture the stories of American veterans and secure them forever.

**A**rmy Cpl. James Donald Meeks was serving with the 90th Infantry Division in Europe during World War II when he came upon a young girl who had no shoes. Meeks traced an outline of her foot on a piece of paper. He then sent the paper outline back home to his family, asking them to mail back shoes in her size so she could protect her feet.

That's just one of the many stories from veterans that can now be shared with present and future generations. The Veterans History Project, coordinated by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, seeks to capture the stories of American veterans like Meeks on video or in writing.

Every veteran is welcome to add his or her personal history to the project, whether these experiences occurred more than half a century ago during World War II, or today during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The families and friends of veterans can also play a role in securing veterans' histories by participating in the project.

The goal of this voluntary project is to reach all veterans across America and obtain their stories to preserve forever in the Library of Congress, according to Robert W. Patrick, director of the Veterans History Project. Capturing their stories will allow members of the public to read about or view the firsthand experiences of veterans thorough the eyes of the men

and women who were there.

With more than 17 million living wartime veterans and the numbers growing as the global war on terrorism continues, the project has recorded 45,000 stories with the help of volunteers from around the country. Volunteers from VA medical centers, Congress and the nation's schools have helped record the stories of their local veterans and submitted them to the Veterans History Project.

"It's very important to honor all veterans and preserve their memories," said Patrick. "The Veterans History

Project depends on a vast network of volunteers to record the stories of veterans all across America and send those stories to the Library of Congress."

conducted interviews. Richardson's parents were World War II veterans, and she has been carrying their stories with her as fading memories since her mother died in 1973 and her father in 1992.

While excited about the ambitions of the project, she only wishes that her parents could have had the opportunity to share their stories with the project. As historian for the VA health care system, her goal now is to get as many veteran doctors and medical staff as possible to share their stories. She has also been working with the Veterans History Project office to inform others about how to participate or volunteer.

Richardson encourages veterans and potential project volunteers to visit [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets) or call toll-free (888) 371-5848. Another option she recommends is contacting local veterans service officers to obtain an oral history or memoir project kit and then asking a veteran to share his or her story.

Some of the stories she's heard have brought tears to her eyes, and she hopes that everyone around the world will get to hear the stories of America's heroes.

"You may not think you have a story, until you open your heart and there is a picture in your mind worth a million words," Richardson said. VA

By Corey McGee



Project depends on a vast network of volunteers to record the stories of veterans all across America and send those stories to the Library of Congress."

Currently, about one-third of all VA medical centers are actively interviewing veterans for the project. Darlene Richardson, historian for the Veterans Health Administration in VA Central Office, has been a volunteer since Congress started the project in 2000. She has introduced the project to many veterans and has



## 26th Olin E. Teague Award

# A 'Feeling of Healing' at Clinic for Disabled Veterans

**T**he co-founders of the New England Winter Sports Clinic for Disabled Veterans are the recipients of the 26th annual Olin E. Teague Award—the highest VA honor recognizing employees whose achievements have been extraordinarily beneficial to the rehabilitation of combat-injured veterans.

Secretary Jim Nicholson presented the award to Ralph Marche and Anthony Santilli of the VA Boston Healthcare System at a Sept. 26 ceremony on Capitol Hill. The clinic was founded nearly 10 years ago by Marche, chief of Voluntary Service, and Santilli, a VA Boston volunteer and Marine Corps veteran. Wounded during his service in the Vietnam War, Santilli used skiing to help him overcome post-traumatic stress disorder and the loss of his left leg. Now, he said, he's "just another skier on the mountain."

More than 300 physically disabled veterans and active-duty soldiers have directly experienced downhill skiing through the annual clinic, which is held at Mount Sunapee, N.H., in January. The clinic promotes rehabilitation by instructing physically challenged veterans in adaptive alpine skiing and winter sports.

Up to 50 veterans are invited to participate each year, according to Marche. Participants have included veterans from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Veterans as young as 19 and as old as 92 have attended the clinic.

Veterans arrive with missing limbs, spinal cord injuries, impaired vision and head injuries. About 100 volunteers work with the veterans to teach them adaptive skiing and snowboarding techniques and get them out on the ski slopes. Both Marche and Santilli are certified adaptive ski instructors. Marche is also a certified adaptive snowboard instructor.

"Adaptive skiing is the art of looking at the abilities of any given individual, taking those abilities and

a fellow disabled veteran.

"You want to let them know that there is life after disability," Santilli said.

He explained that when veterans first become disabled, they tend to dwell upon the things they can no longer do. Skiing down a mountain at the clinic shows disabled veterans that there are things they can still do in spite of their disabilities. In many instances, he said, it opens the door to their willingness to pursue other activities, such as wheelchair basketball, and allows them to get back into society.

Santilli said he is proud of his volunteer work with the clinic. He enjoys "the self-satisfaction of knowing I can get these guys and gals who fought for their country out of their chairs and out of their hospital beds and out on the slopes."

When asked what the disabled veterans get out of attending the clinic, Marche said that skiing down a mountain gives them a sense of speed, a feeling of confidence, a sense of wonder, and the opportunity to see views not visible from a wheelchair.

"There's a feeling of healing on the mountain," Marche said. "That's really what we're able to do."

The Teague award is named after the late Texas congressman who represented the state's 6th District for 32 years. A highly decorated World War II veteran, he served for 18 years as chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. He retired in 1978 and died in 1981. **VA**

By Renee McElween



*New England Winter Sports Clinic for Disabled Veterans co-founder Ralph Marche guides participant Dennis Gammons down the mountain.*

ROB ASHMEAD

enhancing those abilities to allow them to negotiate the mountain and ski down any slope," Marche explained.

Like many of the disabled veterans who come to the clinic, Santilli had never gone snow skiing until after he lost his leg in Vietnam. He signed up for skiing lessons when he returned from the war, and learned to ski on one leg. When the clinic participants see him show up on the slopes with one ski and outriggers, he said, they are able to relate to him as

## Iraqi Officials Visit VA to Learn About U.S. Programs for Veterans



MICHAEL L. MOORE

VA Deputy Secretary Gordon Mansfield, left center, addresses the Iraqi delegation during a briefing in the Omar Bradley conference room in VA headquarters.

VA Secretary Jim Nicholson and Director General of the Iraq Veterans Agency Nabil K. Said made a joint appearance in VA Central Office on Aug. 25 to announce VA assistance in the development of veterans programs in Iraq, which is a key piece of that country's

continuing efforts to assume full responsibility for its national defense and accelerate the reduction of U.S. military presence in Iraq.

"Veterans issues are a critical component and an integral part of Iraq's military policy," said Nicholson. "Ad-

ressing and meeting the needs of Iraqi veterans is vital to forming an effective security force, improving recruitment and retention and permitting the U.S. to reduce its military presence in Iraq."

Nicholson hosted Said and members of a delegation

from Iraq's Defense Ministry, who "embedded" with VA leaders and staff to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes and programs necessary to establish a comprehensive veterans organization. Their meeting in Washington followed earlier meetings in Iraq during Nicholson's recent visit there to meet with Iraqi leaders and observe medical care for U.S. troops in forward operating areas.

"The establishment of a comprehensive veterans agency is unprecedented in Iraq's history," said Nicholson, who added, "their challenge in establishing veterans programs is no less daunting than the challenges faced by George Washington and the first American government."

Unlike the United States, where veterans affairs and defense are separate agencies within the government, Iraq's veterans agency is part of the Defense Ministry, making veterans issues an integral part of Iraq's military policy. **VA**

### Secretary Visits Military Treatment Centers in Iraq

VA Secretary Jim Nicholson had high praise for the military's treatment of wounded servicemembers after touring combat medical facilities in Iraq in August. "Our servicemembers in the combat theater receive the best care in the world, and VA will continue to provide world class care when they return home and take off their uniform," he said.

The Secretary toured front-line medical facilities in Iraq to observe firsthand the care servicemembers receive as they proceed from the combat theater through military treatment facilities in Europe and finally to military and VA medical centers in the United States. Nicholson visited U.S. medical facilities in Iraq with Reps. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, John Boozman (R-Ark.) and John Salazar (D-Colo.).



COURTESY HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Secretary Nicholson addresses Iraqi and Arab media at a news conference outside the home of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, right, after a meeting between the U.S. delegation and the president's cabinet. At left is House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Steve Buyer (R-Ind.); behind them are Reps. John Salazar (D-Colo.), left, and John Boozman (R-Ark.).

## Personal Identity Verification Card for Employees is Launched

VA will introduce a new Personal Identity Verification (PIV) card for employees beginning in October. This PIV or “smart” card is among the latest technology in the federal government’s innovations to increase security throughout agencies and Cabinet departments.

VA employees will start transitioning to the smart card on Oct. 27, with help from the Office of Human Resources. Joseph Bond, project manager of the smart card initiative in VA Central Office, said plans call for employees at all VA facilities to transition to the new identification cards by 2009.

President Bush mandated in August 2004 that standardized PIV cards be issued throughout the federal government. Bond noted that the issuance of smart cards to VA employees is a priority of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary.

Issuance of smart cards to VA employees will be conducted in a phased approach over the next three years as employees’ current identification cards near their expiration dates. In order to obtain a PIV card, VA employees will be required to undergo identity proofing and ensure that all forms of identification are up to date. Employees will be required to bring two forms of identification to the identification card department of their facility, one of which must be a state- or federal government-issued picture ID.

Once employees provide this documentation, they will be required to be fingerprinted before the smart card is issued to them. Employees who have previously gone through fingerprinting and security check

will not have to go through it again. The information included on the smart card will be limited to the employee’s name, fingerprints and three digital certificates.


Transitioning to a smart card will eliminate the need for multiple cards currently used by employees to gain access to VA facilities, except for workers who are in transit for less than six months. These employees will have one additional card. The smart card should be the only identification needed to gain access to VA facilities across the United

States, along with other government facilities.

In addition to gaining access to VA facilities, employees will eventually be able to use their smart cards to gain access to their computers at work. In June 2007, smart cards will initially be used by VA Central Office employees to gain access to their computers at work, according to Bond.

Eventually all computers throughout VA will be equipped with an attached smart card reader. VA Central Office employees will log onto their computers by sliding

their smart cards into the reader and then entering a four-digit access code. When an employee leaves their workstation, they must eject their smart card from the card reader and take the smart card with them so they will be properly logged off the computer, thereby preventing unauthorized access. According to Bond, having the card readers installed will increase computer security.

For more information on the smart card initiative, visit [www.smart.gov/iab](http://www.smart.gov/iab) or call (202) 273-9554. 

## Benefits Open Season Begins in Mid-November

It’s that time again! The 2006 Open Season will be held from Nov. 13 through Dec. 11. There are three separate programs that will participate in this year’s Open Season: the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program; the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS); and the new Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP).

During the FEHB Open Season, eligible employees will be able to enroll, change options or plans, reduce or cancel health insurance, as well as enroll or make changes to premium conversion. FEHB plan guides and brochures are available on the Office of Personnel Management’s Web site at [www.opm.gov/insure/health/index.asp](http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/index.asp). Employees are strongly encouraged to use Employee Express at [www.employeeexpress.gov](http://www.employeeexpress.gov) when making their FEHB Open Season elections.

Employees who want to elect a health care flexible spending account, a limited

expense health care flexible spending account, or a dependent care flexible spending account must make an election during Open Season. FSAFEDS enrollments do not roll over from year to year. Visit the FSAFEDS Web site ([www.FSAFEDS.com](http://www.FSAFEDS.com)) for more information about these options and news about this year’s Open Season.

Starting this Open Season, OPM is offering the new dental and vision benefit program, FEDVIP. Coverage for employees who elect dental or vision coverage under FEDVIP during this Open Season will be effective Dec. 31.

The FEDVIP program is a voluntary supplemental insurance with no federal government contribution and is not dependent upon FEHB enrollment. Active federal employees will be able to use pre-tax payroll deductions to acquire benefits under the program. Some current FEHB health plans already provide a degree of dental and vision

coverage, but employees may still choose to obtain the supplemental coverage under FEDVIP. This program will offer enrollees group dental and vision insurance at competitive rates without pre-existing conditions. Employees must be eligible for the FEHB Program in order to be eligible to enroll in FEDVIP. It does not matter if they are actually enrolled in FEHB—eligibility is the key.

Enrollments in FEDVIP will be available as self-only, self plus one, and self and family on the BENEFEDS Portal at [www.benefeds.com](http://www.benefeds.com). Eligible federal employees will be able to use the site starting this fall to enroll and manage their enrollment in FEDVIP. For updates about the program, visit the FEDVIP Web site at [www.opm.gov/insure/dentalvision](http://www.opm.gov/insure/dentalvision).

For more information on this year’s Open Season, contact your servicing HR office or visit the Web site [vaww1.va.gov/ohrrm/Benefits/Benefits.htm](http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrrm/Benefits/Benefits.htm). 

## VA Begins Nationwide Conversion of Employee Payroll Services

VA began conversion of its employee payroll services to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) on Aug. 23 under a federal program designed to reduce costs by consolidating 26 federal payroll operations into four operations.

The first group of VA employees had their payroll records converted to DFAS for payroll services beginning with their Sept. 8 paycheck. VA employees' pay will be handled by the DFAS payroll office located in Pensacola, Fla., and staff at field stations throughout VA. Payroll services for VA employees are currently provided by the Financial Services Center in Austin, Texas, and staff at field stations throughout VA.

The conversion is being undertaken under the federal e-Government initiative for e-Payroll, which is managed by the Office of Personnel Management. The initiative supports the President's information technology goals by reducing operating costs and avoiding duplicative systems

investments across the federal government through the consolidation of payroll services within the federal government.

The first group of VA employees to have their payroll records converted includes 1,250 employees in the following organizations:

- Station 104 – Financial Services Center
- Station 105 – Administrative and Loan Accounting Center
- Station 200 – Austin Automation Center
- Station 281 – Veterans Benefits Administration (Austin)
- Station 705 – Office of Resolution Management
- Station 777 – Employee Education Services

This conversion will not change the pay periods for VA employees, but their pay dates will be affected. Although most VA employees consider the first Friday the official pay date, since that's the date pay is received through electronic

funds transfer, VA's official pay date has historically been the second Tuesday of each pay period. The first Friday has been the settlement date. As a result of this conversion, VA has now established the first Friday of the pay period as VA's official payday. The official payday and the settlement date will now be the same.

The payroll services provided by DFAS will result in a few changes for VA employees, such as an enhanced earnings and leave statement that will eventually provide more detailed explanations of changes in current earnings/ deductions, a separate section for retroactive adjustments, and additional year-to-date information. VA employees will receive two W2 forms during the year their payroll records are converted to DFAS—one from VA and another from DFAS.

Payroll services for remaining VA employees will be converted in six additional phases over the next two years. VA's conversion timetable to DFAS is contingent upon sat-

isfactory attainment of specific performance measurement criteria. A priority initiative for the Bush administration, the consolidation of payroll operations for all civilian employees in the executive branch is slated to be complete by April 2008.

Three federal agencies have transferred their employee payroll services to DFAS: the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The Broadcasting Board of Governors is scheduled to migrate their payroll services to DFAS in March 2007. DFAS currently provides payroll operations for more than 800,000 federal employees. With the addition of 250,000 VA accounts, that number will increase to more than 1 million federal employees paid by DFAS.

For more information about the consolidation of payroll services, visit [www.opm.gov/egov/e-gov/e-payroll](http://www.opm.gov/egov/e-gov/e-payroll).

VA

## Old Cell Phones Helping Soldiers Stay in Touch With Families

VA employees can help soldiers on active duty deployed in support of the global war on terrorism stay in touch with their loved ones back home by donating their used cell phones.

Bill Wetmore, attorney advisor with the Board of Veterans' Appeals in VA Central Office, collects used cell phones, batteries and chargers for the Cell Phones for Soldiers program. Once he has collected enough donated equipment for a shipment, he calls FedEx for a pickup. FedEx ships the phones at no charge to a collection center in Colorado, where the equipment is recycled for resale. The money from the recycling effort is used to buy prepaid calling cards for troops stationed in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

He said he decided to register with the national program to make his office available as a collection site in Washington, D.C., because he thought it seemed like a good idea. "I think it's pretty significant for their morale," he said of making free phone cards available to the deployed soldiers. "Studies have shown that people perform better when their morale is high." Wetmore collected 61 phones from VA employees in September 2005 and 104 phones in September 2006. He said he doesn't keep track of how many free calling cards his collections result in. "If it was one phone card, I'd still do it," he said. For a complete listing of drop-off locations throughout the United States, visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com).

## McDonald's Honors 'Milkshake Man' for Inspiring Disabled Veterans

McDonald's Family Restaurants of the Greater Washington, D.C., area honored VA Central Office employee and disabled Vietnam veteran Jim Mayer, better known to injured troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center as the "Milkshake Man," for his longtime service as a volunteer peer visitor at the hospital during an Aug. 22 ceremony.

For more than 16 years, Mayer, who lost his legs in Vietnam and now works in the Office of Seamless Transition, has brought cheer to the wounded warriors he visits at Walter Reed with milkshakes he picks up at the nearby McDonald's on Georgia Avenue. He's paid for countless milkshakes out of his own pocket, but the \$250 in gift cards McDonald's presented to him during the ceremony at the restaurant paid for the



David DeLacy, right, representing McDonald's, congratulates Jim Mayer at the Aug. 22 award ceremony.

next few rounds.

David DeLacy, director of

operations for the restaurant, presented the "Arch Cards" to

Mayer, along with a "Most  
(continued on page 30)

## In Memoriam: Former VA Deputy Administrator Rufus H. Wilson



Wilson

Former VA Deputy Administrator Rufus H. Wilson died Aug. 1 in Columbia, Md., at the age of 80. He served as deputy to Max Cleland, VA administrator under President Jimmy Carter and later a U.S. senator from Georgia.

Cleland, who was 34

when Carter named him to head the Veterans Administration, told *The Baltimore Sun* that he asked the older and more experienced Wilson, a lifelong Republican who had held high-ranking positions in VA during the Eisenhower, Nixon and Ford administrations, to serve as his deputy to counteract his own "young tiger, militant Vietnam vet" status. The former administrator counted revamping the vocational rehabilitation program and launching the vet center program as among his and Wilson's biggest achievements together.

Born in Sweetwater, Tenn., and raised in Detroit, Wilson joined the Marines shortly after graduating from high school. He was wounded


in action on Saipan during World War II. Suffering spinal injuries that could have left him a quadriplegic, Wilson underwent extensive rehabilitation before being released with partial paralysis in his legs and right arm.

After attending Wayne State University in Detroit, he joined the American Veterans of World War II (AMVETS) in 1946, becoming national commander of the organization in 1954. He joined VA in 1955, working as field service director and congressional liaison service director. Beginning in 1958, Wilson spent 10 years managing VA regional offices in St. Petersburg, Fla., Lincoln, Neb., and Baltimore.

He returned to Washington to serve as chief benefits

director and was named associate deputy administrator in 1970. He became the first director of the National Cemetery Administration in 1974 and later served again as chief benefits director.

After Ronald Reagan defeated Carter to win the presidency in 1980, Wilson served as acting VA administrator for a few months before moving on to work as Republican counsel and staff director for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee until his retirement in 1989. He belonged to or held honorary memberships in numerous veterans service organizations.

Wilson's wife Florence died in 1985. His survivors include two sons, a daughter, and four grandchildren. 

## Bruce Schaffer

If you go to the Fayetteville National Cemetery, you'll see the work his hands have done. You'll see freshly mowed grass nestled next to pristine white headstones. You'll see the rolling hills of the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, and you'll see what he sees—a national shrine—a beautiful, lasting tribute to America's veterans.

Bruce Schaffer knows this cemetery. He walks the grounds every day looking at the beauty and looking for imperfections. He mows. He trims. He plants. He cares—a lot. He cares about the veterans he serves and the visitors who come to honor them.

Schaffer, an Army veteran, is the cemetery work leader and has cared for the cemetery since 1989. He leads a team of four employees and two volunteers. He jokingly notes that the word "work" is in his job title, but he enjoys being a hands-on guy.

"I'm doing something I really enjoy," Schaffer said. "There's a passion here amongst the whole crew to do the best we can."

He also feels passionately about the history of the cemetery and gives credit to the founders for their vision in selecting the location. Even though Fayetteville is growing rapidly, Schaffer is pleased the beauty of the cemetery is still intact and retains its historical

significance.

Located south of town, the cemetery was first established during the Civil War era. In 1867, the first five acres for the national cemetery were purchased from local residents David Walker and Stephen K. Stone. One Union soldier described the town as "a beautiful little hamlet nestling among the foothills of the Ozark range ... the chief education center of the state, the home of culture, refinement and that inborn hospitality so characteristic of the South."

On April 18, 1863, this tranquility was broken by the fierce Battle of Fayetteville. Confederate Gen. William Cabell led 900 cavalry north from Ozark to attack federal forces occupying Fayetteville. The federal forces quickly recovered and pushed back the Confederate charge.

The original layout of the cemetery, according to a sketch, is of an outer circle surrounding a six-pointed star with diamonds between the points of the star and a flagpole in the center. There were 18 sections with an estimated capacity of 1,800 graves. During World War II, the layout was revised and five sections were added.

The first burials were reinterred remains from local Civil War battlefields such as Pea Ridge, Prairie Grove and



JIM DELAP

*Bruce Schaffer, center, instructs temporary cemetery caretakers Justin Gipson and James Silkwood on the proper placement of a flower vase at a gravesite.*

Elk Horn Tavern. Interments were originally made with the headstone and inscription facing the flagpole. An inspection report dated May 1871 states there were 1,210 interments in the cemetery, "the greater portion being unknown white soldiers." When the new sections were added in the mid-20th century cemetery, the placement of headstones was altered so that the inscriptions

face the interred remains.

Fayetteville National Cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 28, 1999, and later added to the Civil War Discovery Trail.

Schaffer summed up motivation for his job by adding, "There's nothing more final than what we do. We do it very well for our veterans." **VA**  
*By Jurita Barber*

### 'Milkshake Man' continued from page 29

Valued Guest" certificate. He said he's pleased that Mayer not only chose McDonald's milkshakes to take to the troops, but that they come from his restaurant. "This restaurant has been in this community for 42 years, so we're just really glad."

Mayer delivers an average of 45 shakes a week—mostly chocolate—and has dropped only two. "When you take a McDonald's milkshake to a newly injured soldier or Marine, it's like taking a little piece of America to them, something they've thought

about in the sand and heat," he explained. "It brings a little smile to them."

He said he's learned some unexpected but valuable lessons during his more than 500 visits to Walter Reed. "I used to think that I would go in and tell my own story and

that would be some kind of role model example, but that's not what I have learned. What I've learned is to listen to them a little, what they just went through, what their hopes are, and become their friend by what they tell you. That's the real power." **VA**

## VA Pittsburgh Leads National Effort to Prevent Spread of Dangerous Bacteria

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, a treatment-resistant form of bacteria that spreads through direct contact, is called a greater threat to public health than SARS or bird flu. The rapid spread of bacteria that causes skin infections in healthy people and can kill the seriously ill is spurring a search-and-destroy effort at hospitals across the nation.

VA hospitals, which serve millions of patients, began

Healthy people can often shed the bacteria on their own, but those with weakened immune systems may suffer blood poisoning, severe pneumonia, and even death. Preliminary estimates by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that MRSA causes about 90,000 serious infections and kills 17,000 people a year.

At VA hospitals, patients entering will get a nasal swab to test for MRSA. Those carrying the bug will be isolated from other patients and treated by caregivers wearing protective gowns and gloves.



*Darlene Dietrich, R.N., a clinical manager with the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, swabs patient Robert Oaks to test for MRSA, a form of treatment-resistant bacteria.*

rolling out a program in August to test everyone for the bacteria on admission and discharge. MRSA is now carried by an estimated 2.3 million Americans, most of whom show no signs of illness. Hospital officials want to identify carriers to prevent them from getting sick or passing the germ to others.

MRSA passes through skin-to-skin contact or shared personal items and is immune to common antibiotics.

Those undergoing invasive surgery will be “decolonized”—washed with special antibiotic soap and given effective antibiotic creams for the nasal passages, which harbor the bacteria. At the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, universal testing for MRSA cut infections from 20 a year to two among patients in the 140-bed acute-care unit, according to Dr. Rajiv Jain, chief of staff in Pittsburgh and leader of the national VA ini-

tiative.

## Houston VA Patient Fitted With Bionic Foot

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston recently became the first VA medical center to fit a patient with the Proprio “Bionic” Foot, just weeks after Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

This technologically advanced prosthesis thinks for itself, responding automatically to changing terrain, stairs, slopes, and level-ground walking as needed. The device’s active ankle motion allows users to tuck both feet back behind their knees when getting up from a chair or sitting down so it is not necessary to load the entire body weight on the sound limb. It also points the “toe” down for a more natural appearance once seated.

“Despite its sophisticated technology, this prosthesis has an extremely user-friendly design and is easy to set up and operate,” said Richard Nelson, Orthotic Laboratory chief at the Houston medical center. “During a simple calibration process, the device evaluates and memorizes an individual’s unique gait pattern. Plus, heel height can be easily adjusted at any time without compromising alignment.”

In the past, most VA prosthetic patients lost limbs in combat. Today’s typical patient is a middle-aged male who suffered an amputation due to vascular disease. In the future, VA expects to provide prostheses to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Study Shows Iraq Veterans May Have Memory Lapses

A large study of Army troops found that soldiers recently re-

turned from duty in Iraq were highly likely to show subtle lapses in memory and in ability to focus, a deficit that often persisted for more than two months after they arrived home. But the returning veterans also demonstrated significantly faster reaction times than soldiers who had not been deployed, suggesting that some mental abilities had improved.

The slight deficit, often unnoticed by the soldiers, could make it difficult for some of them to learn and remember information as quickly as they are accustomed to, according to the researchers. These lapses are more common but less disabling than emotional reactions to combat like depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, the researchers said, and in many cases probably reflect a natural adaptation to life in Iraq, with the reaction time strengthening at the expense of some other mental functions.

The study, published in the Aug. 2 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, is the first to track carefully such changes in mental functioning over time in soldiers who deployed to a war zone and those who did not.

The research team, led by Dr. Jennifer J. Vasterling of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, administered a battery of mental tests to 654 male and female soldiers who served in Iraq at various times from April 2003 to May 2005. The tests were given before and after deployment. The soldiers did significantly worse in tasks that measured spatial memory, verbal memory and their ability to focus than did 307 soldiers who had not been deployed to Iraq. VA



REGINALD HEYWARD

*Lisa Cates, a criminal investigator with the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, and Jeffrey Kaufman, the facility's chief of police, demonstrate the free gunlocks they have been distributing to veterans who have unsecured firearms in their homes.*

## Firearms safety for veterans

Because household firearms pose the potential risk of injury or death, the VA Stars and Stripes Healthcare Network (VISN 4) in Pittsburgh has launched a firearms safety program for veterans. The program especially targets veterans with dementia who have access to unsecured firearms in their homes and the caregivers of these veterans, according to Karen Elechko, Dementia Clinic coordinator at the Coatesville, Pa., VA Medical Center. However, the program is open to all veterans who have unsecured firearms in their homes.

Jeffrey Kaufman, chief of police for the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, has obtained 3,000 gunlocks free of charge for distribution in VISN 4. To obtain a free gunlock, the veteran, preferably accompanied by a caregiver or next of kin, can visit one of the VA medical center police departments in the network. Police officers will educate the veteran and his or her caregiver or next of kin on the proper use of the gunlock.

## VA job for unemployed veteran featured in paper

A leisurely scan of the Sunday newspaper by Tom Whitlock, assistant Veterans Service Center manager at the St. Petersburg, Fla., VA Regional Office, led to a job offer for an unemployed local veteran. As the key manager involved in hiring for the Veterans Service Center, Whitlock's attention was drawn to an article in the *St. Petersburg Times* headlined "Not Enlisted and Not Employed." The article featured the plight of Army veteran Kevin Mauga, who had served in Iraq driving a 5,000-gallon fuel truck on a perilous journey back and forth between Ramadi and Habbaniya. Since his return to the United States and completion of his military obligation, Mauga had been unable to find a civilian job.

Whitlock contacted the reporter who wrote the article and obtained a phone number for Mauga. On Monday morning, with half a tank of gas in his Chevy Impala and less than \$50 in his bank account, Mauga traveled to the St. Petersburg VARO to meet with Whitlock and discuss possible job opportunities. After an interview and a tour of the office, Mauga was offered and accepted a position as a file clerk at the VARO.

## Another birthday for oldest known veteran

The world's oldest man—and oldest known veteran—celebrated his 115th birthday on Aug. 21. **Emiliano Mercado del Toro** attended a party in his honor at an outdoor plaza in Isabela, Puerto Rico. He has been certified as the oldest man in the

## Opening of veterans' gallery



TANYA LAFUENTE

*Robert Nardelli, CEO of Home Depot, right, attended a ceremony dedicating a new veterans' gallery at the Wilkes-Barre, Pa., VA Medical Center in memory of his father, Raymond, a WWII veteran and volunteer at the facility. With him are Kenneth Langone, left, co-founder of Home Depot, and Roland Moore, director of the Wilkes-Barre VAMC.*

More than 160 people gathered at the Wilkes-Barre, Pa., VA Medical Center to celebrate the opening of the hospital's new Veterans' Memories and Commemorative Gallery. The gallery presents a poignant and personal history of veterans and war with an impressive display of memorabilia from World War II, Korea and Vietnam, including military uniforms, medals, photo albums and newspaper articles donated by veterans and their families.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony on July 23, the gallery was dedicated in memory of Raymond Nardelli, a World War II veteran and Wilkes-Barre VAMC volunteer whose uniform is now on display in the gallery. Nardelli's son, Robert Nardelli, chief executive officer of Home Depot, attended the gallery opening. The gallery is located in an open area on the first floor of the medical center, just above the atrium. The location allows visitors, veterans and employees to visit the gallery at any time.



## Community project for veterans



LUKE THOMPSON

More than 25 local contractors donated time and materials to the gazebo project at the VA medical center in Salisbury, N.C.

Building a gazebo for veterans to enjoy at the W.G. “Bill” Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, N.C., became a community effort. Don Blake of the Charlotte Veterans at Lucent Organization (VALOR) chapter got the ball rolling when he contacted Peter Bader, chief of the medical center’s Facilities Management Service, with his idea for the project. Colleen Walsh, manager of the Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse Store of Salisbury, and other store employees were trying to decide on a community project for the annual Lowe’s Hero Project when two members of the Charlotte VALOR chapter came by to ask for help with the gazebo.

More than 25 local contractors and vendors donated time and materials to the project, including nails, bolts, concrete supports, pressure-treated lumber, composite decking material, cedar shingles, railings and posts, and landscaping. The gazebo measures 20 feet in diameter and includes a 20-by-40-foot raised deck, an elevated walkway, and ramp accessibility from the existing sidewalk.

world by Guinness World Records. Recruited into the U.S. Army in 1918, during the last months of World War I, Mercado del Toro was still in training when the war ended in November of that year.

He offered advice to partygoers on healthy living, attributing his long life to a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol. “I never damaged my body with liquor,” said Mercado del Toro, who managed to quit a 76-year smoking habit when he was 90.

### A second chance to ‘see’ a Cardinals game

Conrad Markmueller, 83 and legally blind due to macular degeneration, can no longer watch his beloved St. Louis Cardinals play. But on Aug. 31, the World War II veteran got another chance to experience a game at the new Busch Stadium with the help of a gadget out of science fiction and a Girl Scout who wants to share her love of baseball with the vision-impaired.

The device works like virtual reality goggles or the visor that allowed a blind character on “Star Trek: The Next Generation” to see. The device—called JORDY after the “Star Trek” character—takes images of whatever Markmueller looks at and then displays the view on a television screen right in front of his eyes, close enough that he can make out the details. Controls allow him to zoom in or out. It can also be used to read books or letters. Markmueller’s trip to the game was part of Elizabeth Grondalski’s project to earn a Gold Award, the highest award for Girl Scouts between the ages of 14 and 18. Her father, Steven Grondalski, is an optometrist at the St. Louis VA Medical Center and works with the JORDY device.

### Making a soldier’s last wish come true

1st Lt. Joseph David de Moors and his wife Vandella lost their son Gabriel to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in 1994. Before de Moors deployed to Iraq he told his wife that if anything were to happen to him, he wanted to be laid to rest with Gabriel, who was buried in Salt Lake City.

As fate would have it, that didn’t happen. De Moors was killed in January 2006 and buried with full military honors at Ft. Mitchell National Cemetery in Alabama. While at the funeral for de Moors, a member of the Patriot Guard Riders, Bill “Snap” Lines, heard the story and decided to help make the soldier’s wish a reality. After months of planning and support from many people, the Patriot Guard Riders raised enough money to arrange to have Gabriel’s body transferred to Ft. Mitchell to be buried with his father. About 500 Patriot Guard Riders escorted Gabriel’s body from the airport in Columbus, Ga., to the cemetery. **VA**

## Special Olympics champion

Ankur Chandan, below, an employee at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, won one gold and two bronze medals in the National Special Olympics games held July 2-8 in Ames, Iowa. Chandan turned in his best times ever in the following freestyle aquatic events—the 50-meter, the 100-meter, and the 4 x 25-meter relay. He competed as a member of the Georgia Special Olympics delegation. His sister, Priya Chandan, a member of the National Special Olympics delegation from Washington, D.C.,



ANN HAMILTON

was on hand to award one of the three medals to her brother during a medal ceremony. Chandan, 24, works in the primary care service line at the medical center and has been a VA employee for five years.

## Honors for young researchers



Two VA researchers—David J. Casarett, M.D., right, and Jennifer L. Gooch, Ph.D.—were among 56 scientists from 11 federal agencies honored by President Bush for their contributions to science and engineering at a July 26 ceremony. They received the Presidential Early Career Award for Science and Engineering (PECASE). Established in 1996 to “recognize and nurture some of the finest scientists and engineers,” PECASE is given annually to researchers early in their careers and is considered to be one of the highest honors bestowed by the U.S. government on outstanding scientists. Casarett does research at the VA Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion in Philadelphia. Gooch is a staff research scientist at the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

Dr. Karen Hsaio Ashe, of the Minneapolis Geriatric Research, Education & Clinical Center, recently received the distinguished MetLife Foundation Award for Medical Research in Alzheimer’s Disease. She is also a co-recipient of the 2006 Potamkin Award from the American Academy of Neurology. These awards acknowledge her voluminous contributions to understanding the molecular basis of memory loss and cognitive dysfunction, hallmarks of Alzheimer’s.

Odette Taylor, a volunteer at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System for the past 48 years, was hon-

ored July 27 by the Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office at the L.A. Pearls Reception. She was one of 19 awardees in the Los Angeles Basin. The L.A. Pearls program honors the contributions of Los Angeles’ senior community. The recipients were chosen for their outstanding work to improve the quality of life for all citizens and promote a positive and productive image of seniors.

The Philippine Nurses Association of America (PNAA) has installed **Rosario-May Mayor**, director of Performance Improvement at the Bronx VA Medical Center, as the new president of the organization. The installation was

conducted in Boston on July 1. The PNAA was formed in 1979 in response to the growing need for a concerted effort to address the issues and concerns of Filipino nurses in the United States.

The **Muskogee Regional Office Support Services Division Super Supporters Team** is this year’s recipient of the Leo C. Wurschmidt Jr., Customer Service Team Award. This award recognizes the team effort of employees who are “Making a Difference in VBA” through their commitment to provide the highest level of customer service. The winning team was nominated for its collective role and quick response to the needs of veterans and VA employees affected by Hurricane Katrina. The active case workload of the New Orleans VA Regional Office was relocated to the Muskogee, Okla., VA Regional Office when the office closed after Katrina struck. This resulted in numerous requests for special payments from veterans who were unable to receive benefit payments due to the unforeseen tragedy of Katrina. These requests created a staggering 1,500 percent workload increase for this team during September 2005 alone.

**Alfred Faticoni**, a volunteer at the VA Connecticut Health Care System in Newington, received the 2006 George H. Seal Memorial Award from the Disabled American Veterans. These prestigious awards honor the remarkable volunteers who serve disabled veterans and their families through the VA Voluntary Service program. Faticoni, a member of DAV Chapter 8 in New Britain, Conn., started volunteering 46 years ago part-time, and became a full-time volunteer when he retired. He helped

found the Transportation Network in 1987. He has driven nearly 207,000 miles transporting some 6,500 veterans to medical appointments and returning them safely home again. He has donated more than 56,210 total hours of his time as a volunteer.

VA is among 10 federal agencies recognized by *Veterans Business Journal* for doing the most for veteran-owned businesses with the release of its “Best Federal Agencies for Veteran-Owned Businesses” list to coincide with the national Veteran-Owned Business Expo held in Hampton, Va., Sept. 21-22. VA enjoys top honors in disabled veteran procurement, sending 2.2 percent of its total spending in fiscal year 2005 to disabled veteran-owned businesses, an increase from 1.4 percent in 2004. Government-wide averages were 0.38 percent in 2004 and 0.61 percent in 2005. VA also places first in non-disabled veteran business procurement, hitting 4.9 percent in 2005. VA and the Department of the Army are also cited for leadership in outreach efforts.

VA Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration **R. Allen Pittman** was selected for the coveted 2006 National Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) Outstanding Achievement Award. The award was presented at the 2006 SAIGE Conference in Anchorage, Alaska, Aug. 27-31. Awards Chairman Veronica Vasquez noted that although Pittman was submitted for the supervisory category, the committee was “quite impressed with the nomination package, in particular with his contributions as a leader in the Department of Veterans Affairs, which warrant high recognition.” VA

**Don Green**, a registered nurse at the St. Louis VA Medical Center, was enjoying his granddaughter's 3rd birthday party at a local restaurant when he was informed that a woman had collapsed. Green responded immediately, and found the young woman not breathing and without a pulse. He began CPR and, with the help of another person, managed to revive the woman. She collapsed several more times before the EMS crew arrived and transported her to a local hospital.

Social Work Service staffers **Inger Blanton** and **Cynthia Chapman**, along with registered nurse **Hattie Miller**, of the **James H. Quillen VA Medical Center** in **Mountain Home, Tenn.**, were leaving a local scrapbooking establishment when they happened upon a disoriented, frail elderly couple roaming nearby. The VA employees determined that the couple had wandered from an assisted living facility two blocks away. They alerted the facility and then escorted the

couple back there.

**Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** firefighter and EMT **John Eric Schmidt** was enjoying a day on the water with his family when he heard and responded to a call for help. After boarding the boat the distress call came from, Schmidt found two men who showed no signs of life, and two women whose breathing was shallow and labored. Schmidt and another EMT began "rescue breathing" on the women while police arranged to have emergency personnel meet the boat at the nearest landing. Carbon monoxide was the apparent culprit. The women were transported to a local hospital and are alive today, thanks to the quick actions of Schmidt and others.

**Tammy Studzinski** and **Diane Renfrow**, licensed practical nurses at the **Madison, Wis., VA Medical Center**, were carpooling to work recently when they came upon a three-vehicle accident. Emergency personnel had yet to arrive and one car was ablaze as

## Helping a co-worker in distress



While eating lunch recently, **Mike Sewitsky**, left, a motor vehicle operator with Facilities Management Service at the VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics, began choking on a piece of meat. For more than a minute he struggled for air and was beginning to lose consciousness. Fellow motor vehicle operator **Billy Corosu**, right, saw Sewitsky in distress and, realizing what was happening, ran to him and performed the Heimlich maneuver, dislodging the obstruction and likely saving his co-worker's life.

## Coming to the aid of a veteran

While eating in the canteen at the Grand Island Division of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, a veteran began choking on his lunch. Dental lab technician **David Stubbs**, left, rushed to the veteran and performed the Heimlich maneuver. The veteran coughed out the obstruction to his airway, and was determined to be fine. Stubbs was nominated for the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Life Saver Safety Award for his heroic act.



the two nurses offered assistance to others who were already rendering aid. They were directed to a young man who had been pulled from one of the vehicles. The victim was afraid the fire would spread and he wanted to be moved farther, but Studzinski and Renfrow instructed him to lie as still as possible and to breathe evenly. The nurses ascertained the man's injuries and passed the information along to EMS personnel when they arrived. They later visited the young man in the hospital and learned he had a fractured vertebra in his back, but the spinal cord was intact, thanks to their calm directions.

While on his way to work recently, **VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System** police of-

ficer **James Hogue** came upon a two-vehicle, head-on collision. He was the first person on the scene and called 911. He then rushed to the closest vehicle and found the driver pinned inside a truck. Hogue searched for the victim's pulse, but found none. Hogue then checked the other vehicle, an SUV, and found three injured occupants, two of whom were pinned in the wreckage. Two more people arrived on the scene and identified themselves as doctors. Hogue directed them to check the first victim in the truck while he continued to comfort and reassure the victims in the SUV. Although there were fatalities from the accident, Hogue's actions brought calm and comfort to those in need. VA

## Never Forget

As part of observances marking the fifth anniversary of 9-11, 184 beams of light were projected into the clear night sky over the Pentagon, each representing a life that was lost there during the terrorist attacks.

