

VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TOURS HAMPTON VA

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By John Rogers | HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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On Friday, May 7, Secretary Denis McDonough, with Congresswoman Elaine Luria (D-Va. Dist. 2), Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Va. Dist. 3) and Senator Mark Warner (D-Va.), visited with Hampton VA Medical Center (Hampton VA) leadership and staff. During the visit, they received briefings, led by medical center director Taquisa Simmons, covering COVID response, Access, vaccine hesitancy, wait times, and suicide prevention. VISN 6 Acting Director Stephanie Young participated in the event. Secretary McDonough toured primary care clinics, the Spinal Cord Injury unit, Women's Health Clinic, as well as made a stop by the Norfolk Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to thank staff for their vaccination efforts.

Secretary McDonough praised the work that Hampton VA personnel have done in caring for our Veterans. A clear example is that the facility has hired more than 50 additional primary care providers over the course of the past 12 months. He also took time out to thank and present challenge coins to several staff members for their outstanding dedication and service to the Veterans Health Administration.

Hampton VA is building a larger Veteran Health Care Center (HCC) to offer outpatient and mental health services in South Hampton Roads. Another, smaller, community-based outpatient clinic also is expected to open in 2025 near Portsmouth and Suffolk. When asked for an update regarding the HCC by local media, Secretary McDonough

TOP PHOTO: VA Secretary Denis McDonough (l) is greeted by Norfolk VFW Commander Hal Roesch II as he arrives at the Norfolk VFW on May 7. The Secretary was in town to visit the Hampton VA Medical Center. (Photo by John Rogers)

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MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING NETWORK DIRECTOR

Happy Summer,

I hope you are already enjoying a more active and relaxing summer than last year, especially those vaccinated! Once vaccinated, the CDC has lifted some of the mask restrictions, and it is nice to see people without masks in some instances. I hope that it stays this way. But to make that happen, we need to continue vaccinating people and taking preventative measures to stop COVID, especially in those over the age of 65 years old.

We anticipate the warm weather (along with the vaccine) will continue reducing the spread of COVID, but fall is only three months away, and just like we do in hurricane season — yes, that’s here, too — we have to prepare. President Biden set a goal on June 3, 2021, to encourage 70 percent of the American population to receive at least one COVID vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director, Dr. Rochelle Walenski, reiterated that there is no magic target to reach herd immunity; however, 70 percent would go a long way to protect our community for the winter months ahead.

The accompanying diagram

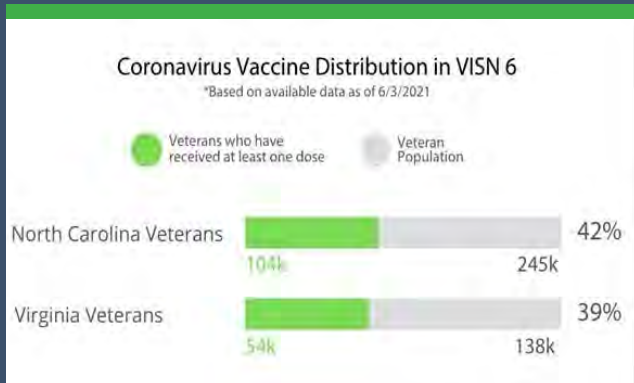
shows how many Veterans enrolled in VA have received at least one dose of the vaccine in North Carolina and Virginia. It took us five whole months to get this far, and to put it bluntly, we still have a long way to go.

VA has evolved our scope of serves and offerings throughout the pandemic to protect Veterans and our community by vaccinating individuals outside our traditional mission. We will continue to be innovative in how we educate and communicate. We are listening and learning from our health care partners and community stakeholders how best to share information with Veterans who may have vaccine hesitation.

We are here to help. If you are interested in partnering with VA for vaccine outreach, please contact our communication department at the VISN: Tara.ricks@va.gov and Stephen.Wilkins2@va.gov, and they will get you the tools and personal you need.

Please also encourage all Veterans to let their primary care teams know if they have received a vaccine in the community to ensure that our data is correct.

These simple things go a long way, and it’s always better when done together.



VISN 6 Researchers Honored During VA National Research Week

The VA Office of Research and Development is encouraging Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations, VA employees and other VA stakeholders to learn more about the significant role that VA Research plays in improving Veterans’ health and welfare. Did you know that VA researchers were part of the innovative teams that developed effective treatments for tuberculosis, invented the CAT scan, and performed the first-ever liver transplant? Cutting-edge research is going on today stronger than ever at VA medical centers nationwide.

Dr. Miriam Morey, a leading researcher in the field of exercise and aging has been awarded the 2020 VA Rehabilitation Research and Development Service’s highest honor — the Paul B. Magnuson Award, for humanitarianism and dedication in service to Veterans.

Dr. Morey is associate director of research at the Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center at the Durham VA Health Care System. “Dr. Morey’s research is a compelling example of blended clinical and research activities,” said Dr. Jean Beckham, co-chair for the research and development committee at the Durham VAMC. “Her clinical demonstration program, Gerofit, has provided robust improvements to aging Veterans by increasing their physical fitness, functional status, and well-being.”

Developing new treatments is the work of researchers like Richmond VA Medical Center’s Dr. David Cifu, a top expert on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Dr. Cifu is the Senior TBI Specialist, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Principal Investigator with the Long-term Impact of Military-relevant Brain Injury Consortium - Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium.

With the Global War on Terror, unique injuries, including TBI, came home with our Veterans. In the last decade, nearly 104,000 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans who receive health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are dealing with TBI. Dr. Cifu is being recognized for the work he has accomplished in advancing Veterans’ health care in this area to improve their lives.



During National VA Research Week, VA highlighted some of the exceptional researchers, including two individuals from VISN 6 who continue to improve the lives of Veterans and all Americans.

Stephanie Young | Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISN 6



Veteran Martin Martinez (l) speaks with Secretary McDonough prior to receiving the Moderna Vaccine at the Norfolk VFW during the Secretary's visit to the Hampton VA on May 7. (Photo by John Rogers)

SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TOURS HAMPTON VA

replied, "obviously a priority, but no news" on a timeline for when that project might be completed.

Secretary McDonough also commented on the collaboration with nearby Hampton University and other partnerships, such as with the Department of Homeland Security, to vaccinate Veterans, stating, "We are now in a position where we have more supply and we have a harder time reaching demand. We're moving our mobile units. We're bringing vaccines to the Veterans. We're trying to make it a much more straightforward process for Vets to get vaccinated. We're engaging directly with Veterans."

The Secretary ended his tour at Norfolk VFW, Hampton VA's vaccination center, where he thanked VFW leadership for their willingness to allow the use of their facility. He spoke with Veteran Martin Martinez and thanked him for his service while receiving his vaccination, and applauded him for getting vaccinated. Team Hampton is very thankful to have spent the day with Secretary McDonough.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough receives a comprehensive facility brief from Hampton VA Medical Center leadership during a visit to the facility May 7. (Photo by John Rogers)



A Filipino-American Story

When the winds of war started blowing in 1940, Jesus P. Pelausa was in college, aspiring to become a doctor. Feeling the need to support his country, he enlisted and became a junior officer with the Philippine Scouts of the US Army.

On Dec. 8, 1941 (Dec. 7 in Hawaii), Lt. Pelausa was the officer in charge of the main gate of Clark Air Force Base when it was attacked by Japanese warplanes. This was simultaneous with the attack on Pearl Harbor. He and his best friend were manning the main gate when it was strafed by Japanese Zero fighters. His friend died from a bullet to the forehead, but Lt. Pelausa remained unscathed.

His unit of Philippine Scouts were to be repositioned to the Visayas and loaded onto a commandeered ferry. Leaving Manila, the ferry hit a mine and sank in shark-infested waters. Lt. Pelausa managed to cling to a wood plank for nine hours and was rescued by an American PT Boat. He, along with other survivors of his unit, were transported to Fortress Corregidor, where they were treated.

His unit was then shipped to Bataan to join the last stand against the ad-



Lt. Jesus P. Pelausa

vancing Japanese. The combined American/Filipino force held off the Japanese for four months but ran out of ammunition and were ordered to surrender. He was among some 76,000 American and Filipino POWs on the infamous Bataan Death March, during which thousands died along the way to POW camps.

Lt. Pelausa survived six months of captivity with dysentery and cholera rampant in the POW camp before he was released by the Japanese in October 1942. He returned to his home province of Bohol. There, he wasted no time in joining the guerrilla resistance movement and participated in hit and run raids against

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Peace and Purpose at a Golden Age

By Joshua Edson | DURHAM VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For 30 years, the National Veterans Golden Age Games offers Veterans aged 55 and older a chance to showcase their athletic skills in friendly competition. From bowling to cycling, track-and-field to basketball, Veteran teams from across the country go for the gold. It is the largest of the VA's six rehabilitation events, and over the years has grown from just over 100 participants in its first year to roughly 800 in recent years.

The Golden Age Games highlight the success of physical rehabilitation. Many of the Veterans competing have had knee and hip replacements and other physical reconstructive surgeries. Another purpose is showcasing the value that wellness and physical fitness provides to older Americans. For many Veterans in their golden years, the games also provide a certain sense of psychological wellbeing — an occasion to connect with their fellow Veterans at a time when many older Americans



Richard Arthur, U.S. Marines, 1967

have felt increasingly isolated due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Kevin Rumsey, a Senior Chief Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran, has always been a runner, be it on the track or in pursuit of his goals.

"I joined the Navy rather late in life," he says. "It was just something I always wanted to do."

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Durham Geriatric Researcher Receives Grant, Honors

By Christopher Camacho

DURHAM VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Durham VA Health Care System Associate Director of Research, Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC) and Director of the Gerofit Implementation Program, Dr. Miriam Morey, was recently awarded \$4.2 million for geriatric research. The Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care released the research award via the CARES Act, which will support Gerofit COVID-19 Recovery Enhancement research being performed at the Durham VA Health Care System (DVAHCS).

“I came to the Durham VA in 1986, and my job was to start an exercise program for older Veterans,” Morey recalls. “It was a lot of fun, and the Veterans improved so much that it stirred me to research to try and see if we could figure out how to take this magic that we were doing at the Durham VA and disseminate it to Veterans who couldn’t come to [us].”

With more than 35 years of geriatric research involving aging adults, Dr. Morey continues to express a willingness to help Veterans. She is one of the pioneers of the Veteran Affairs Gerofit program, and has assisted with the extension of geriatric education and research to 17 VA Health Care Systems. The collaborative efforts of Gerofit have reached more than 16,000 Veterans in the last three years.

“[It’s] been wonderful,” Dr. Morey said. “We had a gentleman from South Dakota, another Veteran from Kansas, someone else from Florida, plus our Veterans from Durham, all together enjoying their Gerofit exercise.”

Gerofit, which was previously only avail-



Dr. Miriam Morey was recently awarded a research grant of \$4.2 million for geriatric studies.

able to Veterans over the age of 65, is currently open to all Veterans. The new research funding empowers the Department of Veterans Affairs to extend the program to Veterans who might need the program but wouldn’t qualify based on age alone.

“I view this as a very targeted, special purpose funding aimed at helping as many Veterans with COVID as we can ... wherever they are,” she says. “We have been working with Geriatrics and Extended Care and Rural Health to refine how we deliver exercise and health promotion to Veterans everywhere, and have good program options for rural Veterans.”

Dr. Morey and her team of physical trainers, medical and clinical staff initiated seven new programs in April 2021 and, with the new funding, will start 27 more Gerofit programs by the end of the year.

“For the first time, our new sites will begin

with a virtually delivered program, and then we will try and figure out transitions to face-to-face [programs],” Dr. Morey said.

Additionally, Dr. Morey received the Paul B. Magnuson Award in 2020, the VA Rehabilitation Research and Development Service’s highest honor. The award recognizes humanitarianism and dedication in service to Veterans. Though named as a recipient of the award in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed efforts to recognize Dr. Morey and restricted in-person presentations. In June 2021, she will be officially recognized as last year’s awardee.

“It’s wonderful to know that your work is going to live on beyond you,” Morey said. “Now I know that the day I retire, Gerofit is so much bigger than me, or anything that I could possibly put forth. Gerofit is all over the VA now. It is beyond words. It’s priceless.”



Congresswoman Manning Visits Kernersville HCC

Kernersville VA Health Care Center (HCC) Associate Administrator Lacy Upchurch (left) discusses outpatient surgery services with (from left) Salima Thomas, district director for Congresswoman Kathy Manning, U.S. Representative Kathy Manning (D-NC 6th Dist.), and Salisbury VA Health Care System Director Joseph Vaughn. The group toured the HCC’s Pre-Op Services as part of a general orientation and tour for Rep. Manning June 3. The Congresswoman declared, “This facility is spectacular. It’s beautifully designed and built, and the staff has been

fantastic.” She appreciated the great job the staff did during the pandemic. “How well this operation functioned during COVID, during a really difficult year, was impressive,” she said. This was Manning’s initial visit to the HCC, and her first meeting with Director Vaughn. “She was very interested in our operations and the challenges Veterans face,” Vaughn explained. “Her passion for Veterans was evident, and she made it clear that we have her full support. That’s really all I can ask for as a director. I very much look forward to working with her.”

WNC VA Health Care System Partners With Asheville Fire Department

By Vance Janes | WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System has partnered with the Asheville Fire Department to ensure that firefighters can maintain continuity of service while Fire Station 8 off Tunnel Road is undergoing a much-needed two-week bay floor renovation.

The station has a ladder truck and an engine, and three shifts of four firefighters who are present daily. The station was originally constructed when firefighting vehicles were smaller, and the renovations will provide a foundation strong enough to hold newer, heavier-type fire trucks.

Jeremy Knighton, Asheville FD Emergency Manager, contacted Rakeyta Scales, Health Care System Emergency Manager, to see if temporary lodging could be set up for the station's crew while work was completed.

Scales said to meet the fire department's needs, she worked with Health Care System Leadership and Facility Management which includes Environmental Management, Police, and IT to designate a space for the firefighters to be housed for two weeks.

The Memorandum of Understanding, or MOU, had to be reviewed by the Health Care System's Office of General Counsel, Compli-

ance Officer, and Leadership for approval, Scales added. the City Manager of Asheville and Asheville Fire Department also signed off.

To prep for the firefighters, maintenance and cleaning activities had to be completed in Bldg. 3 before the firefighters moved in, Scales said.

"Using the VA Building to house Ladder 8 company allows us to stay in our first response area and to be able to continue providing service," Kelley Klope, Asheville Fire Department Public Information Officer, said. "It allows us to keep our response times to a minimum, reaching an emergency as quickly as possible."

The Asheville Fire Department and the WNC VA Health Care System have a long-standing relationship of working together on many things over the years — especially pertaining to Emergency Management.

This situation is no different.

"VA is providing safe and secure housing for our firefighters who live at a station for 24 hours at a time," Klope said. "That includes bedrooms, a kitchen, living areas, office space and nice grounds."

Acting Health Care System Director Dr. Angela Williams said it just makes sense.



Asheville Fire Department Senior Firefighter James "Pow Pow" Repast and WNC VA Health Care System Emergency Management Specialist Rakeyta Scales stand in front of the AFD's ladder truck near Building 3 at Charles George VA Medical Center. The Medical Center and Fire Department recently entered into a community partnership agreement where the firefighters from Station 8 have relocated to the Center while their station undergoes a two-week renovation. The partnership allows Ladder 8 company to stay in the first response area and be able to continue providing service. (VA Photos by Vance Janes/WNC VA Health Care System Public Affairs)

"This is a good example of our collaboration with our community partners," Dr. Williams said. "We're both in the business of taking care of people, we have the space, and in this instance, we were able to help them. In the future, we may need their assistance."

Fayetteville VAMC Med-Surg Unit Upgrades Designed to Enhance Veteran Experience

By Gigail Cureton | FAYETTEVILLE NC VA COASTAL HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Veterans at Fayetteville VA Medical Center 2C medical-surgical unit said goodbye to shared bathrooms and tight spaces thanks to the May reopening of the renovated unit.

The renovation is part of a three-phase project that was started in July 2016. The final phase is still under construction and should be completed by the end of this year.

"It's been a journey. A long journey," said Chief Nurse for Acute Care Rosetta Daniel. "What we had were semiprivate rooms, with four Veterans sharing a bathroom. They would have concerns because there was limited personal space," said Daniel. "It has taken a lot of planning and a lot of time. I am very pleased with what the team, working with our construction partner, was able to accomplish. This is a beautiful space now," she added.

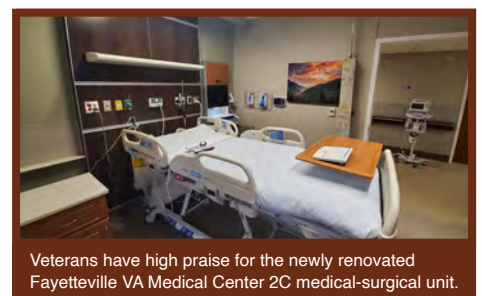
The unit, in addition to private rooms and private bathrooms, includes wide

windows, warm colors and curved soffits to minimize the institutionalized look. "We wanted to make this space appealing," said Daniel.

Veterans also have a variety of in-room entertainment options, complete with movies, cable television, video games and Internet. The new entertainment system will also allow Veterans to access to educational materials and learn more about their medical care thanks to the Get Well patient engagement software.

For Annie Glass, a Vietnam Veteran, the new room is comfort and peace of mind. "I really like my new room. You take the little things for granted until you don't have them. Having my own room and a nice bathroom. It means a lot. It makes being in the hospital a better experience," said Glass.

Unit enhancements also enable the staff to provide better support to Veterans.



"The size of the room, the technology in the rooms, the design of the nurses' station ... everything about the second-floor changes is a better working environment and, more importantly, a better Veteran environment," said Constance Brown, 2C Registered Nurse.

According to Daniel, Veteran comments during the first few days on the new unit summed up the goal: "The Veterans love it. Nothing but good comments, and that makes the journey getting here worth it. It's great to see the finished product and have rooms that are modern and Veteran-centric."

A Filipino-American Story

the Japanese occupiers.

In 1945, General Douglas MacArthur broadcast that he was on his way back to the Philippines with the American Army, and called on all Filipinos to rise up and strike at the Japanese. The Bohol Guerillas attacked in force, and in fierce hand-to-hand combat, wiped out the Japanese forces, freeing their province before the American forces landed in Leyte. Lt. Pelausa rejoined the American forces on their march to Manila, on the main island of Luzon. The U.S. Army Philippine Scouts were reconstituted, and the American forces were eventually victorious in liberating the Philippines.

Next was the planned invasion of Japan. The Philippine Scouts were assigned to the first wave of shock troops to land in Japan. Lt. Pelausa and his men were ready, but realized that they likely would not survive. They were relieved that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced the Japanese surrender.

That was not his last brush with death. After the war, Lt. Pelausa was sent to the US mainland to be trained in chemical warfare. However, on his way to Hawaii, the transport plane had engine trouble and was forced to crash land in Pearl Harbor. He survived unscathed, but developed a lifelong fear of flying — he became a “white-knuckle flier.”

He finally left the U.S. military and used his G.I. Bill benefits to fund his way to medical school, graduating in 1950. He married and had two children — a son and a daughter. He then won a scholarship for postgraduate training in the U.S. in anesthesia. Dr. J. P. Pelausa became an excellent anesthesiologist.

In 1965, the beginning of the Vietnam War, Dr. Pelausa decided to relocate his family to Canada. As a former guerilla, he foresaw that the Vietnam war would drag on for decades, and the Vietnamese guerillas would eventually wear down the U.S. Army just as the Filipino guerillas had worn down the Japanese. He remained a member of the American Legion and was proud of being an American Veteran.

Dr. J. P. Pelausa was delighted that both his children followed in his footsteps and became Medical Doctors — his daughter became a neonatologist and his son became an Otolaryngologist. During his career, he “passed gas” in more than 40,000 surgical cases, and no one died during his watch. He passed away surrounded by family and friends in 2010, much respected and loved. He was a decorated Filipino-American war hero, a good husband, a dependable father, and an excellent physician — a life well-lived.



Music therapy programs, including Guitars for Vets, have been a vibrant part of the Durham VA and other VA medical centers in the VISN and throughout the nation.

Guitars for Vets Program Offers Healing Through Music

Established in 2007, Guitars for Vets, a non-profit organization, came together when Marine Corps Veteran Dan Van Buskirk took months of guitar lessons from Patrick Nettesheim. Through their lessons, Van Buskirk was able to learn to play the guitar and since then, the two became friends. Both realized that these lessons created an outlet for expression as well as provided a positive interaction. Together they went to the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee, Wis., to share their story. Since then, Guitars for Vets, or G4V, has expanded into 110 VA chapters in 40 states.

The G4V guitar instruction program can help Veterans working through physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other forms of emotional distress. Music therapy is an evidence-based clinical treatment designed to help Veterans through music. The therapy can help improve Veterans' communication, coordination and interpersonal skills. Nettesheim also developed the G4V “four-way path,” which consists of Patience,

Acceptance, Gratitude and Empathy (PAGE). These are the guiding principles used throughout the program.

The G4V program starts with a 10-week instruction period. During this time Veterans are given one-on-one individualized lessons. They promote teaching the music that appeals to the student and works at the students' pace. After completing the lessons, the graduation process involves receiving a free acoustic guitar and guitar accessory kit. The next step is to continue practicing and learning. Each month there are group sessions organized by one of the 110 (and growing) chapters. The group sessions develop a community of fellow Veterans and guitarists. To date, G4V has provided more than 4,000 guitars to Veterans.

Enrollment in G4V requires a referral from a case or social worker to a local VA office that offers a G4V program. G4V does not control admission into the program. To find a local chapter, they offer a locator tool on their site <https://guitars4vets.org/about-us/find-a-chapter/>.



VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

#VETRESOURCES
GUITARS 4 VETS

Guitars for Vets is a network of volunteers teaching guitar lessons to Veterans across the country.

www.VA.gov/VetResources



Central Virginia VA's Homeless Veterans Program Managers Assist Local Organizations, Help Crater Region Reach 'Functional Zero'

RICHMOND, Virginia — Homeless Veteran Coordinators with the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's (CVHCS) Homeless Veterans Program, in partnership with community organizations dedicated to ending homelessness, have made great strides during the past several years. Today, CVHCS's community partners, including Crater Area Coalition on Homelessness (CACH), St. Joseph's Villa and Built For Zero, announced a major milestone in the fight against Veteran homelessness during a press conference at the historic Petersburg Courthouse: Functional Zero.

To be certified as a Functional Zero community, organizations and local governments in the Crater Region have created and sustained a support system that ensures that fewer Veterans are experiencing homelessness than can be housed in a month. The certification of Functional Zero means Veteran homelessness is rare and brief when it does occur, according to Brooke Pendleton, a homeless

Veterans coordinator with CVHCS. "Significant progress has been made to prevent and end homelessness," Pendleton said during her remarks. "The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the United States has declined by nearly half since 2010. Since 2010, over 850,000 Veterans and their family members have been permanently housed or prevented from becoming homeless."

The Crater Region covers nine counties and independent cities across Southeastern Virginia. The region is the 11th nationwide to be certified as Functional Zero, due in large part to the collaborative efforts of the Central Virginia VA and community partners. The work of the VA and community organizations will continue, according to Pendleton.

"Ending homelessness is possible," Pendleton said. "To achieve this goal, we need continued leadership, collaboration, commitment and a sense of urgency from communities across the country. Every time a previous-

CVHCS homeless Veterans coordinator Brooke Pendleton announces at a press conference that CVHCS's community partners have achieved a major milestone in the fight against Veteran homelessness — Functional Zero.

ly homeless Veteran in our community goes to sleep at night, they are in a safe, comfortable space because of the hard work of the people here today."

Homelessness is a community issue that no one organization can address or solve alone. Homeless Veteran Coordinators with Veterans Affairs medical facilities across the country partner with organizations at the federal, state and local levels. The partnerships, like those with CACH, St. Joseph's Villa and Built For Zero, represent a commitment to finding innovative solutions to the complex issue of homelessness in the community, according to Kimberly Tucker, Senior Director, Flagler Housing and Homeless Services at St. Joseph's Villa.

VA to Re-Adjudicate Veteran and Survivor Claims for Possible Herbicide Exposure

WASHINGTON — Veterans who were previously denied service connection for an herbicide-related presumptive condition due to lack of in-country Vietnam service will have their claims automatically re-adjudicated by VA.

The department began re-adjudicating claims in April for Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War but were denied for one or more herbicide-related conditions on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass of

the Republic of Vietnam or on its inland waterways.

"Re-adjudication means VA will review the evidence of record and provide replacement decisions in the cases of Veterans who were previously denied service connection benefits," said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "We have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our Veteran community and will ensure all eligible Veterans' and their survivors' claims are examined thoroughly and fairly."

The review also applies to eligible survivors of deceased Vietnam-era Veterans

and is part of the Veterans Benefits Administration's implementation of the Nov. 5, 2020, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California order in *Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, requiring VA to re-adjudicate previously denied claims.

VA will determine if benefits for qualifying disabilities can now be paid retroactively to the date of previously denied claims. The court's decision requires automatic re-adjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the survivors or estates of deceased beneficiaries.

More information is available regarding VA disability benefits based on Agent Orange exposure.

Peace and Purpose at a Golden Age

By Joshua Edson | DURHAM VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS



As a Religious Programs Specialist, Kevin's career choice took him into the world that relatively few Navy personnel get to experience, serving directly with U.S. Marines.

"When you're Navy and you're going to serve with the Marines," says Kevin, "You have to go to a kind of bootcamp with Marine Corps Drill Instructors. It's physically demanding, so it pays to be in shape."

A National Class runner at nearly 60-years-old, this is Kevin's first experience with Golden Age Games.

"Road racing and track-and-field," says Kevin with a smile. "I call it 'recovery through sport,' helping me make that recovery from combat."

Originally from Syracuse, New York, Richard Arthur is something of a Golden Age Games legend. For more than 20 years,

the U.S. Marine Corps and Vietnam Veteran has been competing in the Games, with an impressive display of medals to show for his efforts.

"It's been a great experience for me," says Richard, "Our group is scattered all over the country, so it's great that we can get together and support each other."

This year, Richard will be competing in basketball (free-throwing events), and his true passion, air-rifle marksmanship.

"My grandfather taught me how to shoot when I was young," says Richard. "I've always loved to hunt, and this another way I can pursue my passion."

Despite a move to North Carolina a few years ago, Richard's passion for the games has never wavered. Despite the recent pandemic, which forced him to compete virtually.

(LEFT PHOTO) "I call it recovery through sport." U.S. Navy Reserve Senior Chief Petty Officer Kevin Rumsey stretches before hitting the trails in Durham, North Carolina. A National Class runner since his late 20s, this is Kevin's first year competing in the National Golden Age Games. **(MIDDLE PHOTO)** Mr. Richard Arthur, a U.S. Marine Corps and Vietnam Veteran poses with his air-rifle while competing in the virtual marksman event for the 2021 National Golden Age Games. This year will mark 21-years of competitions in the games for Mr. Arthur. **(RIGHT PHOTO)** Kevin Rumsey in Fallujah, 2004.

"I always look forward to this," says Richard. "From the fundraising to get out to the games, to the experience itself. Even without all the medals, the experience, the camaraderie and the recovery make it worth the effort."

If you or a loved one would like are interested in the Golden Age Games, please visit <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/national-veterans-golden-age-games/>.

Therapy Pets Provide Comfort for Hospital Residents

By Rosaire Bushey

SALEM VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

For patients like Myron Harold, a furry robot is a long way from where he stood nearly 70 years before. Harold was a staff sergeant serving on the infamous Heartbreak Ridge in Korea when he limped off the field, frozen and taken to a field hospital where he nearly had both legs amputated. But despite frostbite, his limbs were saved. In an interview with a local author, Harold said the saving of his legs was "my miracle." He made it back to his unit and finished 18 months of combat.

After his tour in the Army, Harold ran a fruit business, raising and selling apples and peaches. Now 90 years old, Harold lives in the Community Living Center of the Salem VA Health Care System's Medical Center in Virginia. He sits in a hallway, smiling, and petting a small golden-furred puppy.

The dog, a robot he's named Peaches, was one of several cats and dogs given to the Salem VA in 2020 as a first-of-its-kind program through the American Red Cross, and according to Georgine Gulotta, Nurse Manager of the CLC, the animals are a wonderful addition to the facility.

"For more than a year now, many of the people here haven't been able to visit with their loved ones in person, and some of them have created very meaningful connections with their robot pets," Gulotta said.

The pets, which can be petted, combed and even washed, have grooming aids, and they become the pet of a single Veteran who will often give them a name and treat them like any living pet.

"It takes them back to a happy time, a comforting time," Gulotta said. "It's an ideal thing for residents and patients, especially lonely people who don't have visitors."

The program was inspired by a doctor at the Salem VAMC and made possible through the generosity of Gene Rose, a Red Cross Volunteer who was working in conjunction with Red Cross Service to the Armed Forces Manager, Patti Wilson. Rose deployed with the ARC to Iraq and Afghanistan in 2009 to provide services to military members, and according to Christy Carneal of the ARC Virginia Region, wanted to do something for the ARC's military programs.

"We were able to make his idea happen because of Gene's desire to help," Carneal said. "Gene purchased robotic cats on behalf

of the American Red Cross for Salem, and after that initial donation, we have also provided dogs, as well as a pet care cart that has bed rolls, blankets, collars, leashes and brushes that patients can use to care for their pets."

Carneal said the ARC is excited about the interaction and comfort the therapy pets bring to the patients, especially during COVID when so many are in increased isolation.

Gulotta, who has seen the impact the therapy pets have had, summed up the program: "Any program like this is just invaluable — more than people could ever imagine."



Korean war veteran myron harold, 90, with peaches.



Dr. William Yancy Receives the HSR&D Award for Research Paper of the Year

On May 10, 2021, Dr. William Yancy, a research associate at the Durham VA Health Care System Health Research and Development (HSR&D) Center of Innovation to Accelerate Discovery and Practice Transformation (ADAPT) and associate professor at Duke University Medical and Weight Lifestyle Management, was awarded the HSR&D Award for Best Research Paper for 2020. The award recognizes the top 10% of funded research papers submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs health and research department.

When asked about his dedication to research and medicine, Dr. Yancy states, “I have a deep love for science and biology in particular. I grew up in a family that had healthcare-related professions. My father was a pediatrician, my mom was a nurse. So, I was exposed, at an early age to healthcare and medicine. It was something I wanted to do since elementary school”. Dr. Yancy’s background in medicine has a direct association with the military. His father is a Navy Veteran and practiced medicine while on active duty.

The primary focus of Dr. Yancy’s work is weight management in association with dietary weight-loss interventions, and essentially medical issues related to obesity and treatments for obesity.

“What inspires me are the improvements that can happen when people make changes and their weight goes down and they see health improvements. It inspires me when I

can help a person to make certain changes and feel like they are more in control of their life and health”, said Dr. Yancy.

The greatest questions that remain in weight loss and management involve investigations into dietary interventions for weight loss, research about how people interact with dietary interventions, how people can benefit more from dietary medical research, and how to inspire long-term adherence to healthy dietary practices.

In regards to the future of weight loss management and research, Dr. Yancy states, “There are a lot of other treatments, including medication, procedures, and surgeries, but really it comes down to how people eat and how they can change the way they eat. Helping people to adhere to dietary interventions is going to be really important going forward”.

The HSR&D Research Paper of the Year examines group medical visits for diabetes, which is two-fold. The first aspect of the research focuses on weight management and the other focuses on the use of medication for weight loss. The hypothesis for the research is helping people to lose weight aids in a reduction of medication.

“The benefits are a reduction in low blood sugar spells, a reduction in their weight, and an improvement in their stress or distressed related to diabetes. This demonstrated that weight management in a group setting could improve diabetes outcomes”, said Dr.

Yancy.

The research paper, which was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, explains how the group setting helped Veterans to lose weight, improve blood sugar levels, to lower the risk of high blood pressure (hyperglycemia), and reduce medications.

Dr. Yancy is a past recipient of HSR&D’s Career Development Award, the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientist and Engineers (PECASE), and the Duke University School of Medicine Excellence in Professionalism Award.

“I would like to acknowledge all the people that helped with this project. This was not a small project. It was a joy to work with several other investigators who helped to develop the question and protocol, and then a great research staff. There was a lot of collaboration. Thanks to the Durham VA Ambulatory Care Team who allowed us to use their meeting rooms and the Greenville Health Care Center, who assisted with bringing in more participants for the study”, – said Dr. Yancy.

Statement by VA Secretary McDonough on President's FY 2022 Budget

President outlines proposals to invest in critical health care improvements and increased opportunities for Veterans

The Biden-Harris administration recently submitted to Congress the president's budget for fiscal year 2022.

As the administration continues to make progress defeating the pandemic and getting our economy back on track, the budget makes historic investments that will help the country to build back better and lay the foundation for shared growth and prosperity for decades to come.

This bold budget request by President Biden to Congress will ensure that VA is moving swiftly and smartly into the future, with much-needed monetary investments in our most successful and vital programs. To fulfill VA's sacred promise to care for our nation's Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors, we must return the investment that Veterans have made in America through their service.

The budget includes the two historic plans that the president has already put forward — the American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan — and reinvests in education, research, public health and other foundations of our country's strength.

The total 2022 request for VA is \$269.9 billion (with medical care collections), a 10% increase above 2021. This includes a discretionary budget request of \$117.2 billion (with medical care collections), a 9% increase above 2021. The 2022 mandatory funding request totals \$152.7 billion, an increase of \$14.9 billion or 10.8% above 2021. VA's 2022 request is in addition to the substantial resources provided in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Additionally, the President's FY 2022 Budget includes \$18 billion as part of the American Jobs Plan to address VA health care infrastructure needs in the short and long term, together with \$260 million for the American Families Plan to support the administration's commitment to provide supplementary support to Veterans who are parents, in order to offer a holistic, family-friendly approach to care.

At the Department of Veterans Affairs, the \$117.2 billion discretionary request would:

- Work to eliminate Veteran homelessness and prevent Veteran suicide. The budget includes \$2.2 billion in discretionary appropriations for Veteran homelessness programs, to include \$486 million in American Rescue Plan funding. This will support expanded case management services to help more Veterans gain permanent housing through housing vouchers and prevent

homelessness among low-income Veteran families. Additionally, the budget includes \$598 million for Veteran suicide prevention outreach programs that address the risks for suicide, with the goal of intervening before a Veteran reaches a point of crisis. VA will also support the new Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program.

- Help our Veterans build civilian lives of opportunity with the education and jobs worthy of their skills and talents. The budget supports the president's commitment to help Veterans with education and job training by making key investments in the Veterans Benefits Administration. This includes an increase of \$81.5 million for the Digital GI Bill Modernization Effort to better serve Veterans who are using their GI Bill benefits. Funding also increases by \$5 million for Veterans' Clean Energy Job Training in conjunction with the Department of Labor, and by \$3.6 million for the VA Disability Employment Pilot Project to assist eligible Veterans with service-connected disabilities seeking employment opportunities.
- Ensure that VA welcomes all Veterans, and that diversity, equity and inclusion are woven into the fabric of the department. The department is making a strong commitment to ensuring VA welcomes all our Veterans, to include women, those of color and whom are LGBTQ+. To support that commitment, VA has created a new Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion, which will benefit from an increase of \$12.9 million to strengthen VA's diversity program.
- Keep faith with our families and caregivers. The budget provides approximately \$1.4 billion, an increase of \$350 million for the Caregiver Support Program. Through this program, the Veterans Health Administration provides support to individuals who act as caregivers for Veterans. The 2022 budget supports the phased expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to include all eligible Veterans, no matter when they served.

Enacting the budget policies into law this year would strengthen our nation's economy and lay the foundation for shared prosperity, while also improving our nation's long-term fiscal health.

For more information on the President's FY 2022 Budget visit: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>.



JUNE IS PTSD AWARENESS MONTH

VA Plans Expansion of Benefits for Disability Claims for Conditions Related to Certain Toxic Exposures

New evaluation process to be applied in identifying future presumptive conditions

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced two major decisions related to presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia.

AGENT ORANGE

VA will begin implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list of those presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism.

“Many of our Nation’s Veterans have waited a long time for these benefits,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “VA will not make them wait any longer. This is absolutely the right thing to do for Veterans and their families.”

VA will apply the provisions of court orders related to *Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, which may result in an

earlier date for entitlement to benefits for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Vietnam War-era Veterans and their survivors, who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions, will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors.

PARTICULATE MATTER EXPOSURES

The secretary recently concluded the first iteration of a newly formed internal VA process to review scientific evidence to support rulemaking, resulting in the recommendation to consider creation of new presumptions of service connection for respiratory conditions based on VA’s evaluation of a National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine report and other evidence. VA’s review supports initiation of rulemaking to address the role that particulate matter pollution plays in generating chronic respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis, for Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian

Gulf War and/or after Sept. 19, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War.

“VA is establishing a holistic approach to determining toxic exposure presumption going forward. We are moving out smartly in initiating action to consider these and other potential new presumptions, grounded in science and in keeping with my authority as Secretary of VA,” said McDonough.

VA is initiating rulemaking to consider adding respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis, to the list of chronic disabilities, based on an association with military service in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the covered periods of conflict. VA will conduct broad outreach efforts to reach impacted Veterans and encourages them to participate in the rulemaking process.

For more information, visit our website at [Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures - Public Health \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/airborne-hazards-and-burn-pit-exposures-public-health).

If you have questions, send queries to mail to: VAPublicAffairs@va.gov



**VA UNITED FOR
EQUALITY**
= PRIDE MONTH 2021 =

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

MEDICAL CENTERS

Asheville VAMC

1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911 | 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov

Durham VAMC

508 Fulton Street
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6880
www.durham.va.gov

Fayetteville VAMC

2300 Ramsey Street
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106
www.fayettevilleenc.va.gov

Hampton VAMC

100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961 | 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov

Richmond VAMC

1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000 | 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov

Salem VAMC

1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463 | 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov

Salisbury VAMC

1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000 | 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Albemarle CBOC

1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252-331-2191

Brunswick County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3
Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6141

Charlotte CBOC

8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213
704-597-3500

Charlotte HCC

3506 W. Tyvola Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-329-1300

Charlottesville CBOC

590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Chesapeake CBOC

1987 S. Military Highway
Chesapeake, VA 23320
757-722-9961

Clayton CBOC

11618 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West,
Suites 100 & 200
Clayton, NC 27520

Danville CBOC

705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Emporia CBOC

1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville HCC

7300 So. Raeford Rd
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106

Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-908-2222

Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredericksburg CBOC

130 Executive Center Pkwy
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC

2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27809
919-731-4809

Greenville HCC

401 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-830-2149

Hamlet CBOC

100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hickory CBOC

2440 Century Place,
SE Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex

1824 Hillandale Road Durham
North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC

2580 Henderson Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Kernersville HCC

1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
Kernersville, NC 27284
336-515-5000

Lynchburg CBOC

1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC

5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Raleigh CBOC

3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex

3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-755-2620

Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-272-3220

Rutherford County CBOC

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145
Forest City, NC 28043-2459
828-288-2780

Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway
Road Sanford, NC 27332
919-775-6160

Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-8860

Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961

Wilmington HCC

1705 Gardner Rd.
Wilmington, NC 28405
910-343-5300

Wytheville CBOC

165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400

DIALYSIS CENTERS

VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek

8081 Arco Corporate Drive
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-286-5220

VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville

2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101
Fayetteville, NC 28305, 910-483-9727

VET CENTERS

Charlotte Vet Center

2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Fayetteville Vet Center

2301 Robeson Street
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center

3515 W Market Street, Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27403
336-333-5366

Greenville Vet Center

1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center

110-A Branchwood Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Norfolk Vet Center

1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Raleigh Vet Center

8851 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
(919) 361-6419

Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Virginia Beach Vet Center

324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
757-248-3665

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VISN 6 EDITORIAL

Stephanie Young // Acting VISN 6 Network Director
Tara Ricks // Director of Communications
Steve Wilkins // Editor

PRODUCTION TEAM

Fanning Communications
John Fanning // President + CEO
DeAnna Clark // Graphic Designer
Karl J. Paloucek // Editor + Copywriter

