

VOICES OF VISN 6

Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here

Asheville

VETERAN'S PHOTO CAPTURES GOLD AT ARTS FEST

A PHOTO IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



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ASHEVILLE, NC — They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but in this case, it brought one employee from the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System national recognition.

Caryn Cash's black-and-white photograph was one of the winners in the 2021 Creative Arts Competition invited to participate in the 41st National Veterans Creative Arts Festival hosted by Bay Pines VA Health Care System in Florida.

Cash's photo, "Fowl Play," shows a young boy sitting with a couple of chickens. "There is just something so timeless about shooting in black of white," Cash said. "For this picture, it just captured the pure joy that he has playing with his chickens. He usually doesn't like pictures, but when he has his 'girls,' he's all smiles. I like to say that

TOP PHOTO: Caryn Cash's photograph "Fowl Play" was a winning entry in the 2021 Creative Arts Competition that has been selected to participate in the 41st National Veterans Creative Arts Festival hosted by Bay Pines VA Health Care System in Florida.

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MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Hi Team,

VA is changing the way it strategically plans for the future, and I want to give you an overview of what's happening on March 14, 2022.

It is no secret that VA operates the country's largest and oldest integrated health care system, serving 9 million Veterans. Our roots date back to the Civil War, when the first hospitals and homes for disabled former soldiers began to open. Much of VA's health care infrastructure was built in the 1940s and 1950s for World War II Veterans. As many of our employees and Veterans have seen firsthand, delivering modern health care in aging infrastructure comes with a fair share of barriers.

Today, in 2022, our Veteran and employee needs and expectations of health care delivery continue to evolve — and to ensure that VA stays a leader in Veteran's Health Care, VA must evolve, too. We must invest in our employees, VA's number one asset, providing them the tools and infrastructure needed to continue delivering high-quality, reliable health care to Veterans. We must also modernize VA's health care delivery to Veterans to ensure that we meet their current and future needs.

In 2018, VA's MISSION Act established two requirements to meet the above goals:

- Requires VA to perform market area assessments at least once every four years.
- Requires a VA Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) by a newly established AIR Commission in 2022.

BACKGROUND:

In 2018, VA's Chief Strategy Office created a new health care delivery strategic planning process called the Market Area Health Systems Optimization (MAHSO) project that oversees VA's market assessments and recommendations.

In 2019, VA contracted Guidehouse Corp. for three years to study the geography, demographics, demand, supply, quality, patient satisfaction, and cost of every VA Health Care

System across the nation. In 2021, virtual listening sessions were held in major markets across VA, resulting in significant input; and more than 1,800 interviews were conducted with VA leaders across the nation to understand their barrier to delivering modernized health care.

In 2021, the VA MAHSO team submitted a 10,000-page document called the Modernization & Market Assessment, which included 1,700 potential recommendations to the SECVA and top VA leadership for review. Following the internal VA review, and at the request of the SECVA, a 'Red Team' convened consisting of federal and commercial health care experts to review the market assessment recommendations and provide additional input and revisions.

In Jan. 2022, VA Secretary McDonough finalized the recommendations and asked VA leadership to brief all VA employees and critical stakeholders on their facility recommendations before he submits them to the Federal Register/AIR Commission on March 14, 2022; and over the last two weeks, our leadership teams across the region have conducted town halls, VSO, and Congressional meetings to review local facility recommendations that will be included in the AIR report.

On March 14, 2022, Secretary McDonough will submit the 10,000-page Modernization & Market Assessment Recommendations to the AIR Commission via the Federal Register. The proposal of the recommendations is said to be the most significant redesign of [the VA health care system](#) since the World War II era.

The AIR Commission, a bipartisan, presidentially and congressionally appointed group, will review the VA's recommendation. The AIR Commission has a year to submit its recommendations to the President with any changes they deem necessary. During that time, they will hold public hearings, visit VA facilities, meet with VA partners and listen to Veterans to assess those recommendations.

After the AIR Commission sends the recommendation to the president, he will have two weeks to review the updated VA Modernization recommendations and then transmit a report to the AIR Commission and Congress

containing his approval or disapproval of the Commission's recommendations. Suppose the president disapproves the recommendations in whole or in part, the president then must send his reasons to the AIR Commission and Congress before the end of his two-week review time. The AIR Commission will be required to send a revised list of recommendations to the President in 14-days.

After the president has reviewed and approved, Congress has 45 days to reject those recommendations as a whole. If Congress approves the president's submission, the VA Secretary can begin developing plans, recommendation priorities and funding over the next three years. It is important to note that congressional and presidential recommendations are likely to look different from those initially submitted, and approved recommendations are projected to span over the next 20 years.

IMPORTANT KEY POINTS:

The AIR recommendations will have no significant impact on Veterans, VA employees, and the VA facilities where Veterans receive care in the near term. While these are the recommendations going to the AIR Commission, they represent the start of the process and not the end of it. We do not yet know what the Commission, president, or Congress will approve. Potential change to our infrastructure is years away — in some cases 20 years. The timeline to complete implementation will vary within each market as VA works through a process to prioritize and fund projects.

Veterans will always be at the center of VA's health care services. VA must continue evolving to ensure that we provide the best and most up-to-date Veteran health care today and for future generations. The Secretary and I pledge transparency throughout this multi-year process, and we will work together to make sure that you remain informed as this unfolds.

More information, including the full AIR Report, will be available on www.va.gov on March 14.

PAUL S. CREWS

MPH, FACHE, VISN 6 Network Director

A Grandmother's Passing Puts Research Scientist on Path to Cure Alzheimer's

By Todd Goodman

SALISBURY VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

As a result of her grandmother passing away from Alzheimer's disease, a would-be fourth-generation farmer embarked on a different career path — one in which she could devote herself to finding a cure for the most common cause of dementia worldwide.

Dr. Miranda Orr, a Research Health scientist with Salisbury VA Health Care System and assistant professor at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital, grew up in a very small town in rural northeastern Montana.

"My hometown has fewer than 200 people in it," she said. "We are mostly farmers and ranchers."

She, too, was going to follow in her family's footsteps until her grandmother passed away. That was when she decided to go in a different direction.

"It was very hard to accept as a young adult that her doctors had nothing to give her," said Orr. "I thought it was because we didn't have access to cutting edge health care in that part of the country. But it turns out that's not the case. There simply aren't cures."

Orr had just graduated Montana State University. Emboldened by the recent loss of her grandmother, she asked one of her former professors how she could help find a cure. He told her she would need to become a scientist, which she did. She received her PhD in Neuroscience and began focusing on the biology of aging — more specifically, attempting to determine at what point healthy aging becomes unhealthy and causes disease.

"For example, if you get a sunburn, your skin cells experience damage and need to make some decisions," she said. "If the damage is so bad they can't repair it, they can divide with that damage, which causes cancer, or the

cells may just die."

And then there is a third option. The cells can become senescent, meaning they don't die or divide. They survive the damage and become dysfunctional cells.

"They become resistant to death, and release substances that are very toxic to neighboring cells," she said. "And that causes neighboring cells to get sick, and they can either die or become senescent as well."

The most important point of Orr's study was to prove that senescent cells were in the brain and how they could be recognized. Her research in 2018 had identified these cells, but the methods had been developed based on cells growing in a dish, not in an aged human brain. She and her team weren't sure if senescent cells were incredibly rare, or if the methods needed to improve. The only way to better understand the impact of senescence in the brain was to develop more sophisticated methods to identify them.

"We looked at 76 brains and about 180,000 individual cells from older adults that had passed away in different stages of Alzheimer's," she said. "Using a new method, we were able to profile them, one by one, to see if they were senescent."

Because senescence is a complex process, she needed to look for multiple features for confirmation. She discovered that about 2 percent of the cells were senescent, with most being neurons. These are the brain cells critical to things like learning and memory.

The process took four years to confirm. "It's not easy to spot senescence," said Orr. "We had a good idea what the answer was four years ago, but we had to keep validating and retesting the hypothesis. We used many different approaches to confirm the cells were senescent."

Just knowing that senescent cells reside

in the brain is a big step in finding a way to eliminate them.

"We're excited about our study," said Orr. "It's gaining attention, primarily for its implications toward new treatment options. Our team is looking at Alzheimer's from the perspective of aging. Why as we grow older, does our risk for Alzheimer's increase? As we better understand aging, we may be able to find treatments for age-related diseases."

Senescent cells accumulate in all tissues as people age and contribute to all sorts of dysfunction. There now are dozens of new biotech and pharmaceutical companies focused on developing therapies to remove these cells.

"We first had to know they were there," she said. "We are confident that we found unique cells that may contribute to Alzheimer's. Our hope is that if we target these cells, we may be able to alter the process."

Orr said a clinical trial is beginning to test whether these drugs — by removing senescent cells — show any benefit to Alzheimer's.

"I imagine there will be more treatment options specific to each person's disease stage," she said. "We have ongoing projects to determine at what age senescent cells first appear in the brain. With this information, we may be able to start treating patients in early stages to prevent disease progression and dementia."

With this study complete, one of Orr's next challenges will be to see if senescent cells contribute to Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS). Veterans are at an increased risk for developing ALS, and she wants to know if senescent cells may be contributing.

"The hardest thing for me to do is not think about my research all of the time," said Orr. "Everything we do in my laboratory is focused on trying to answer questions that may someday make a positive impact on human brain health."



(LEFT PHOTO) Dr. Miranda Orr (standing), Research Health scientist with Salisbury VA Health Care System and assistant professor at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital, and her team are focused on the role of senescent cells in the progression of Alzheimer's disease in aging patients. **Photos provided by Wake Forest School of Medicine (RIGHT PHOTO)** Though hailing from farm country, Dr. Miranda Orr decided, upon her grandmother's death, to pursue a career path that would enable her to devote herself to the finding of a cure for Alzheimer's disease. **Photos provided by Wake Forest School of Medicine**

Asheville Veteran's Photo Captures Gold at Arts Fest

A PHOTO IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

that he has a way with the chicks ...”

Cash, who has worked at the VA for eight years, said she has been interested in photography for as long as she can remember, and has recently taken up shooting portraits and tribute sessions for older animals.

Cash currently works in Accounts Management at the Health Care Facility, and said she is no stranger to the competition.

“It’s not my first time competing,” she said. “I have entered the contest for [the past] five years. That’s when I was first told about the Creative Arts competition.”

Even so, her win caught her off guard.

“Complete shock!” she said. “I told my subject that I won with his picture, and he just smiled from ear to ear. He’ll find me outside while he’s playing with his chickens and ask if I want another winning picture! He’s hilarious!”

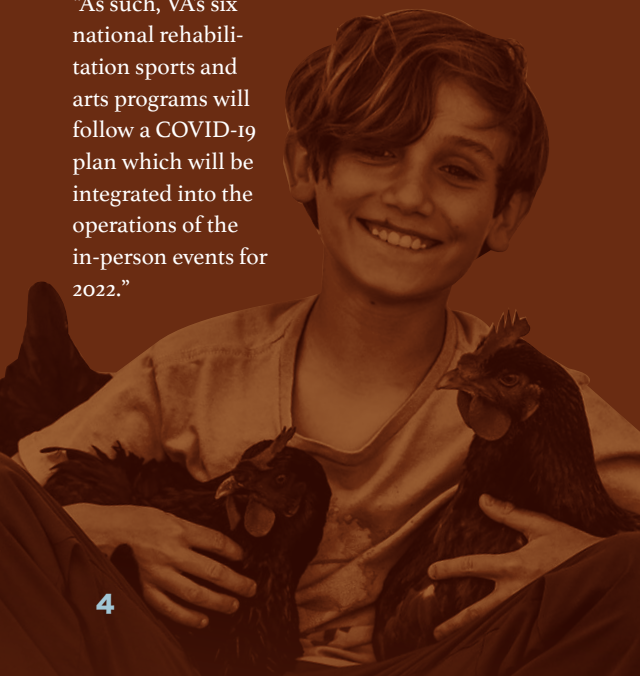
Rebekah Wiggins, who works as an art therapist for the Health Care System, said the win was quite a feat.

“One-hundred eighteen VA facilities, over 1,400 submitted entries to the national level,” she said. “Asheville [had] one person who won 1st Place nationally in Black and White Photography.”

The competition was open to a wide field of entries, and recognition of those who participated will be conducted in a safe way, said Amy Kimbler, Director of the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival, in an email.

“VA remains committed to honoring our nation’s Veterans by ensuring a safe environment to deliver exceptional health care,” she stated.

“As such, VA’s six national rehabilitation sports and arts programs will follow a COVID-19 plan which will be integrated into the operations of the in-person events for 2022.”



Artists Jason Ford and Ed Trask (not pictured) recently completed a mural dedicated to Veterans named “The Journey of a Veteran.” The mural was unveiled Feb. 14 at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System to kick off National Salute to Veteran Patients Week activities. (Photo: David Hodge, Visual Information Specialist)

Mural Dedicated to Vets Unveiled for National Salute Week

Written by David Hodge

National Salute to Veteran Patients Week is a long-standing VA tradition in which members of the community and Veterans Affairs employees come together to show gratitude to Veteran patients.

While events of the past two years have not allowed leaders and staff at Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) to show their full appreciation, in 2022 the facility is excited to unveil a large mural dedicated to Veterans.

The mural, titled “The Journey of a Veteran,” is the work of two Richmond artists, Ed Trask and Jason Ford. It highlights five Veterans from the local community.

“I wanted to bring a mural that would bring a sense of optimism,” Trask said. “I wasn’t sure at first. I was kind of scared about not representing Veterans well.”

Any fears the artists may have had dissolved quickly after sitting down and having a conversation with the Veterans, learning about their experiences and histories, while soaking in their personality and mannerisms.

“Once you pull back the layers and see who they were, and how they are doing today, it was amazing to hear about their resolve,” Ford stated.

The mural features each Veteran twice: a current depiction and an image of them from their service. Ford said he hopes their work brings some additional life to the space.

“My father was in the Navy,” Ford explained. “After the opportunity to speak with the Veterans, I went back to my father to ask him some questions about his service.”

Trask said he hopes the mural honors

the people, shows their stories, and acts as a symbol of Veteran lifestyle.

Trask, originally from Loudon County, Va., studied painting and printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 1995, he moved back to Richmond after a few years on tour with a punk rock band. It was then he began painting murals around the city.

“I wanted to make a difference with murals,” Trask said. “Murals can give a sense of identity to a neighborhood.”

Ford, born and raised in Richmond, has painted for the past 20 years and worked on large murals for the last eight years.

“Vets have such a selfless approach,” Ford said. “That was intriguing to see. Sometimes, the greatest treasures come from what I learn from the subjects.”

Thanks to Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond, along with a corporate partner, for working with the CVHCS Center for Development and Civic Engagement department to make this mural possible.



Artists Jason Ford (left) and Ed Trask pause from working on a mural named “The Journey of a Veteran.” The mural was unveiled Monday, Feb. 14, during National Salute to Veteran Patients Week at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System in Richmond, Virginia. (Photo: Jason Miller, Visual Information Specialist)



Congresswoman Deborah Ross gives a parting fist-bump to Mr. Andrew Barlow, an Army Veteran and patient at the Durham VA Healthcare System. Congresswoman Ross visited Veterans on Valentine's Day to hand out cards to Veterans. The Veterans were made by students from her district.

Rep. Ross Delivers Valentines for Veterans

By Joshua Edson | DVAHCS INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

Veteran patients of the Durham VA Healthcare System (DVAHCS) got a special treat on Valentine's Day. More than 200 hand-made cards were delivered by Congresswoman Deborah Ross, Representative for North Carolina's 2nd Congressional District and a serving member of the House Judiciary Committee.

The cards served several purposes, to send a bit of Valentine's Day love to our Nation's Heroes, to kick off this year's National Salute Veteran Patients Week, a time to express appreciation to Veterans and increase community awareness of the role of the VA healthcare system, and to spread a bit of Valentine's Day cheer and to let Veterans know that they haven't been forgotten in these days of lockdowns and social distancing.

The cards, which came in a variety of colors and sizes, were made by students of the Wake County, North Carolina Boys and Girls Club as well as young members of the Southeast Raleigh YMCA. For Congresswoman Ross, there was also a personal reason to take the time to hand out the cards.

"My father was a Vietnam era Veteran, and regularly uses VA services," says Congresswoman Ross. "I felt that this was the least I

could do to give a little thanks to our Veterans."

In past years, students could hand deliver the cards themselves. But, as COVID-19 restrictions remain in place at the DVAHCS, Congresswoman Ross took it upon herself to make sure the cards made it into the hands of Veterans.

"This is time well spent, said Congresswoman Ross. "These valentines are a small gesture of my appreciation and the appreciation of our entire community for the service and sacrifice of our Veterans."

After meeting with DVAHCS Executive Leadership, Congresswoman Ross then visited Veterans on the surgical wards. There, she met with nursing staff and went room to room, to hand a card to each Veteran. For many of the recipients, the cards were a heartwarming boost to the monotony of recovery.

"When you get sick, life becomes a series of ups-and-downs," said Andrew Barlow, a Fayetteville resident, and U.S. Army Veteran. "Seeing kids make an effort like this really touches my heart."

Valentine cards are especially important right now for Veteran patients, as pandemic precautions can make some hospitalized Vet-

erans feel detached from their loved ones and communities. Congresswoman Ross' efforts to get these precious cards to Veterans helps bridge the social distance gap.

"I am immensely grateful for the dedicated staff at the Durham VA Medical Center," says Congresswoman Ross. "[They] provide care to those who have put their lives on the line to defend our country and for graciously allowing me to join them today."



Mr. Michael Dorsch, an Army Veteran and patient of the Durham VA Health Care System, talks with Congresswoman Deborah Ross during her Valentine's Day visit to hospitalized Veterans. Congresswoman Ross handed out Valentine's Cards made by students from her district.

Hampton's Eyes On Sea Level Rise

By Ben Wocken,

HAMPTON VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS



A granite and metal monument marks the landing site of the Jamestown Settlers. Resting a few feet above sea level, it is located between the Hampton Roads Harbor and Hampton VA Medical Center. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

HAMPTON, VA – In 1607, the Jamestown Settlers waded ashore onto the North American continent, relieved to be back on dry land after an arduous ocean voyage. Today, the spot they landed is marked by a granite monument topped with a miniaturized metal model of their ship.

Visitors are free to walk up to the structure - no boat or wading necessary.

Yet sea-level rise (SLR) forecasts present potential problems for future visitors of the monument – and for Veterans seeking care at the Hampton VA Medical Center, located just a stone's throw further ashore.

The Hampton VAMC serves 59,000 Veterans providing world-class healthcare, tailored towards a unique patient population. This population (former Navy Sailors included) requires a water-free environment. It is a battle of damp versus dry, and the future of 'VA by the Bay' operations depend on "dry" winning the battle.

HIRED GUNS, DATA-DRIVEN DEFENSE

Hemmed in by the Hampton Bay, Hampton University and the busy I-64 Interstate bridge tunnel, the VA has no extra land to

expand. With buildings surrounded, it's inherently a defensive position.

To preserve the historic healthcare site against rising tides, the VA is turning towards a data-driven defensive approach. It's a strategy based upon the principle of knowing your enemy - the best path to victory. To gather the data necessary for policymakers to make informed decisions, Hampton is bringing in "hired guns." A team of surveyors are documenting every inch of this "contested" territory.

"Every job has its ups and downs," says Matthew Kratzer as he adjusts the tripod feet on this GPS-fed digital surveying pole. "This one is a lot of fun." Kratzer is a Survey Technician & Drone Pilot for Honor Engineering Company, a VA Contractor based out of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He is part of a crew spending six weeks crisscrossing the Hampton campus, documenting its geographic ups and downs. "We surveyed the VA Medical Center in Erie, Pennsylvania last year. So, we get to travel to different VA sites."

In 2021, Secretary of the VA Denis McDonough issued a 29-page policy document titled U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Climate Action Plan. It outlines present and future VA standards and action steps neces-



Sea-level rise raises critical questions about future waterside facility preservation strategies. (Photo by Ben Wocken)



Matthew Kratzer, Survey Technician & Drone Pilot, receives and saves GPS coordinate signals on the Hampton VA campus Feb. 15, 2022. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

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Seawater proximity is seen in a panoramic view of the low-lying property Settler's Landing Monument and Hampton VA sit on. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

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sary to adapt to climate change:

...VA is developing standards that will require designers of new facilities and renovations to review projections of anticipated future SLR, its effect on flood plains, and site vulnerability to higher storm surges. The new standards will require that selected sites either be protected from flooding or have protective measures in place that can be used to mitigate potential damage.

Kratzer's "up and down" work is a visible manifestation of the VA's battle plan. "Surveying makes sure leadership has the right information needed in case the sea level does rise



GPS coordinate points appear on screen of contractor Matthew Kratzer's survey tripod as he maps and measures Hampton VA's campus Feb. 15, 2022. (Photo by Ben Wocken)

to a certain level -- so they have the awareness to defend and protect themselves. It's the first step to ensure we're not getting flooded out."

We're locating pertinent features in the buildings for future building expansions, or new buildings that the VA wants to put in. We're getting an elevation. We're 'northing' and 'easting' on every single tree, building corner, concrete feature in this whole area. Everything's tied together and mapped out. We even measure the manholes," says Kratzer.

RISING TIDE OF DEMAND

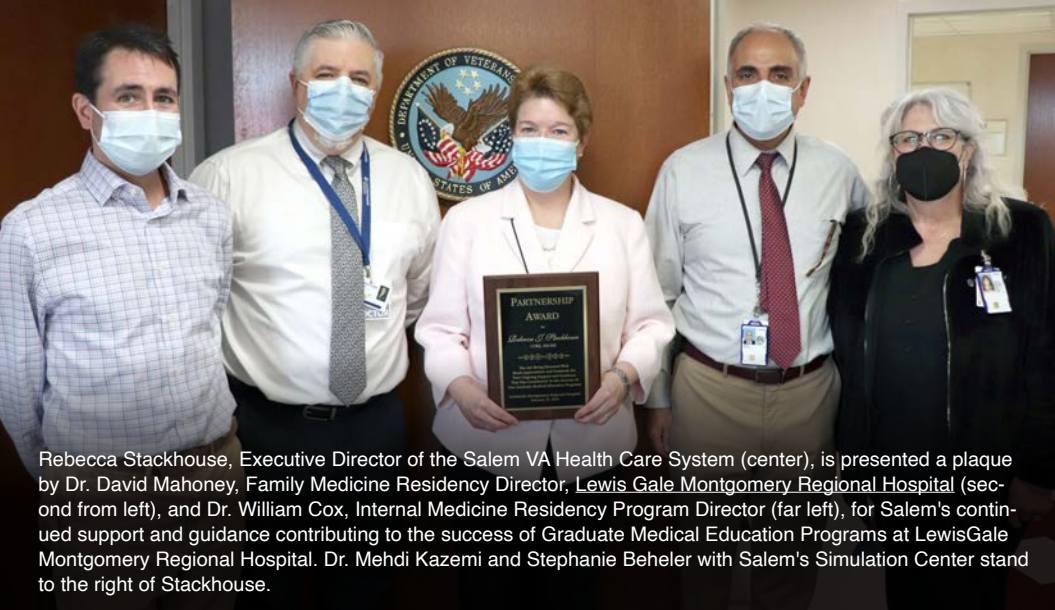
Water levels aren't the only thing projected to rise - so is the demand for Veteran care, following America's longest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Critical clinic expansion decisions must be made at Hampton, in the Tidewater Region and VA-wide. Armed with exact measurements of available spare space, facility sizes and locations, knowable factors become known. Site mapping data will be used to answer questions ranging from the visible: Where will the waterline be if the sea rises 'X amount' of feet? to the invisible: Will building a sea barrier impact underground gas, power or communication lines?

WADING THROUGH DATA

Will future visitors to the 1607 Jamestown monument have to wade through water, or float by boat? If no action is taken, for-sea-ably, yes.

The original Settlers had little ability to forecast the future to adapt to a new land's challenges.

Can Hampton VA forecast and adapt to a changing and challenging landscape? Survey says 'Absolutely'.



Rebecca Stackhouse, Executive Director of the Salem VA Health Care System (center), is presented a plaque by Dr. David Mahoney, Family Medicine Residency Director, LewisGale Montgomery Regional Hospital (second from left), and Dr. William Cox, Internal Medicine Residency Program Director (far left), for Salem's continued support and guidance contributing to the success of Graduate Medical Education Programs at LewisGale Montgomery Regional Hospital. Dr. Mehdi Kazemi and Stephanie Beheler with Salem's Simulation Center stand to the right of Stackhouse.

Access VA on the Go With VA's Mobile App

To better serve, engage and enhance the customer experience, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making it easier for Veterans to take charge of their benefits and health care with the new mobile application, VA: Health and Benefits. The app, which can be downloaded via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store, lets Veterans access the resources they need, wherever they are, when they need them.

GET THE APP AND KEEP MOVING

Our mobile app is a smarter, more convenient way to manage VA health and benefits information. Veterans can skip login with the app by enabling face or finger ID. Veterans can also view and cancel health care appointments, view claims and appeals statuses, upload documentation, message their doctors, locate facilities, and more — right from their phone. It also gives Veterans and their families quick access to the VA Crisis Line anytime and anywhere.

Since the app was soft-launched in August 2021, more than 210,000 users in the Veterans community have downloaded and logged into the app, and as usage grows, so will the app. New features expected in the coming year will allow Veterans to:

- Refill prescriptions
- Request appointments
- View payments and manage debt

Learn more about the service already discovered by hundreds of thousands of Veterans. VA: Health and Benefits is available via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Download today!

TELL VA WHAT YOU THINK

Our goal is to provide exceptional customer service. The VA: Health and Benefits app is a valuable tool to support Veterans' health care and benefits needs. We want to hear your ideas about the new app, how you're using it, or what could help you get started. Contact: vafagship-mobile@va.gov.

Our commitment to digital and IT transformation is shaped by daily dedication to customer service and the close collaboration of our workforce, managers, and leaders. Ready to join us in improving Veterans' care? Check out all current information and technology career opportunities on DigitalVA. You can also contact VA's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer at 512-326-6600, Monday through Friday, 7:00am to 5:00pm CST, or by submitting a resume to VACareers@va.gov.

Salem VA Executive Director Recognized With Partnership Award

By Rosaire Bushey
SALEM VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In mid-February, two members of the LewisGale Hospital Montgomery presented a plaque to Rebecca Stackhouse, Salem VA Health Care System Executive Director. The Partnership Award, for ongoing support and guidance contributing to the success of the Graduate Medical Education Programs, was given, in part, for the work of Salem's Simulation Lab that helped to train residents to effectively use the Point of Care Ultrasound (POCUS) system.

In May of 2021, a patient in LewisGale's intensive care unit had been treated for saddle pulmonary embolism. Early the next morning, following the procedure, the patient's status worsened and a night float resident team of two family-medicine residents and an internal medicine resident performed a cardiac ultrasound at the patient's bedside using the POCUS equipment.

According to Dr. William Cox, Program Director, Internal Medicine Residency, "the cardiac ultrasound showed findings concerning for a large pericardial effusion with clinical concerns for a life-threatening condition known as cardiac tamponade. The cardiologist on call confirmed the life-threatening condition with a transthoracic echocardiogram, and the patient had emergent pericardiocentesis to stabilize the condition. The patient was later transferred to LewisGale Medical Center for cardiothoracic surgical services, where they had a successful pericardial window, and later discharged. The POCUS training our residents receive regularly at Salem VAMC was utilized appropriately,

ultimately saving the patient's life," Dr. Cox said.

The residents: Dr. Darren Gibson, Dr. Chris George, and Dr. Andres Tabares were all recognized by the Board of Trustees at LewisGale Hospital Montgomery for their quick response and outstanding care.

In a second instance, in family medicine, a patient being evaluated by Dr. Crystal Downer, senior family medicine resident, was noted as having a pulsatile abdominal mass during a physical exam.

"Because of this finding, Dr. Downer performed a bedside abdominal ultrasound which showed concerns of an abdominal mass. The patient was sent for advanced imaging with radiology, which confirmed metastatic lung adenocarcinoma," Cox said. "The patient was referred to oncology for treatment of the malignancy, and it was another great example of a resident in our program who utilized their POCUS training from Salem VAMC to have a positive impact in confirming a patient's diagnosis to allow for appropriate referral to receive definitive treatment."

"The work of our entire simulation team, led by Dr. Mehdi Kazemi and Stephanie Beheler, are to be commended for their tireless innovation and training within the Simulation Laboratory," said Stackhouse. "Their work ensures residents are properly trained and made aware of the latest in diagnostic and life-saving tools, has paid off in these instances, and I'm sure many, many more. On behalf of the entire Salem VA Health Care System team, I'm proud to thank Dr. Cox and Dr. [David] Mahoney and the LewisGale team for this recognition."



March is Women's History Month

VA honors our nation's women front-line workers.

In recognition of Women's History Month this March, VA celebrates our nation's women Veterans and VA's own front-line workers whose commitment to healing and service provides hope in the darkest circumstances. Their dedication, contributions and sacrifices cannot be overstated. Join VA as we commemorate women serving on the front lines, and share snapshots of "how it started" and "how it's going." These comparisons highlight women Veteran's timeless, ceaseless compassion and resilience, as well as the evolution of their honorable service. From the nurses and relief workers of our nation's earliest conflicts to the active-duty women stepping up to vaccinate millions, and to the VA staff in leadership positions at VAMCs across the nation, we thank you and honor your service as you gracefully and compassionately brave the front lines.

Throughout March, VA is recognizing our nation's front-line women across social media channels. Recognize and elevate the stories of local women employees who serve. In addition, join us on VA's [Face book](#) and Instagram (@DeptVetAffairs) and follow [Center for Women Veterans](#) to see and share stories of how it started and how it's going. Learn more [here](#).

VA is committed to honoring and respecting women Veterans. VA wants women to have access to resources they need and can trust. Resources for women Veterans offered through VA include:

- [Comprehensive women's health care](#) to serve women Veterans' unique health care needs. Women's Health Primary Care Providers and their teams take care of general medical needs and



- gender-specific care and can refer to specialty services.
- The [Women Veterans Call Center](#) is a free service available to women Veterans, their families and caregivers to answer questions via call, text, or online chat, as often as they need. This includes questions about Veteran status, Veteran ID cards, benefits, and how to make an appointment. All calls are answered by women representatives.
- The [Center for Women Veterans](#) (CWV) coordinates VA's administration of health care and benefits services, and programs for women Veterans. CWV advocates for cultural transformation to make VA the best place for women Veterans to receive quality, comprehensive health care.
- The [Women's Health Transition Training](#) is a free, self-paced course that women Veterans and transitioning servicewomen can take to learn about health care benefits and services offered through VA. Topics include eligibility and how to enroll.
- The [Veterans Crisis Line](#) is for Veterans who are in crisis, or for family, friends, or caregivers who are concerned about a Veteran.

VA Asks for Public Input on Veterans Outdoor Recreation Experience

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs seeks input from Veterans outdoor recreation groups on how it can facilitate the health and wellness of Veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors through improved access to public lands and other outdoor spaces.

[Research](#) shows that access to the outdoors may contribute significantly to better health and wellbeing, and VA wants to learn how it can best integrate outdoor experiences into its [Whole-Health approach](#) to providing care to Veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors.

"We want to use this opportunity to

understand how VA can work closely with Veterans outdoor recreation groups that have been leading the way in using outdoor experiences to help their fellow Veterans heal and stay healthy," said Deputy Assistant Undersecretary for Health for Patient Care Services Maria Llorente, M.D. "We look forward to collaborating with our partners in making outdoor recreation a foundational piece of VA's world-class, Whole-Health-based care."

As part of this request for information, VA is asking individuals, groups and entities involved in providing Veterans outdoor recreation to submit comments, from Feb. 23 to March 25, to help guide the work of strength-

ening the relationship between VA and managers of public lands, identifying barriers that may prevent Veteran access to public lands to augment delivery of health and wellness services, and making recommendations to address those barriers.

The subject document above has officially published in the Federal Register. The official version of this document, supporting documents and additional information about this document is now available at [Federal Register Public Inspection 2022-03734 – Notice for Request for Information Regarding Veterans Outdoor Recreation](#).

VA Outlines New Goals Toward Ending Veteran Homelessness

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough established new goals in VA's efforts to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.

During his Feb. 25 visit, McDonough participated in the local Point-in-Time Count and announced the following action being taken in the Greater Los Angeles (GLA) area:

- Placing at least 1,500 Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing, which would represent a greater than 10-percent increase in permanent housing placements since calendar year 2021.
- Increasing the percentage of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing vouchers under lease to at least 75 percent, which would represent the highest voucher utilization rate since 2018.
- Increasing to 50 percent the percentage of Veterans admitted to HUD-VASH who are housed within 90 days.

Reaching these goals in calendar year 2022 would mark GLA's best outcomes helping Veterans exit homelessness and remain in stable housing in several years and would represent a clear and substantial improvement

on Veteran homelessness locally.

"The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority and our partners have a shared belief that all Veterans deserve a place to call home," said the authority's Executive Director Heidi Marston. "We are eager to support VA in its effort to provide permanent and stable homes for 1,500 Veterans."

In October, after seeing a homeless Veteran encampment on San Vicente Boulevard, near the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center, McDonough set a goal to house 500 Veterans by the end of 2021. The VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System exceeded that goal through a variety of temporary, transitional, and permanent housing programs. Veterans also enrolled in supportive programs that help with the transition to permanent housing.

To increase housing stock dedicated to Veterans experiencing homelessness, VA and HUD will support the state of California and Project Homekey by committing available HUD-VASH vouchers housing projects awarded throughout the state. There are more than 5,000 HUD-VASH vouchers currently available for use in California. This approach creates new housing stock for Veterans while addressing the underutilization of this valuable resource that makes market rate housing affordable for [eligible](#) Veterans.

"Due to significant investments from Congress in the last three years, we have substantial resources to invest in homeless prevention," McDonough said. "We also have proven strategies that have not only decreased the number of homeless Veterans, but also prevented Veterans and their families from experiencing homelessness in the first place. What remains is the energy and effort needed to finish the job. These initiatives will help us get there."

Nationally, VA and its community partners will place at least 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing in calendar year 2022. This represents an increase of more than 10 percent over the number of Veterans placed in permanent housing in 2021.

The number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has declined by nearly half since 2010 with more than 920,000 Veterans and their family members permanently housed or prevented from becoming homeless since then.

Veterans experiencing homelessness should visit their [local VA medical center](#) for assistance. Find the nearest [VA medical center](#). For immediate assistance, contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-4AID-VET or 877-424-3838.

VA Proposes Updates to Rating Schedule for Respiratory, Auditory and Mental Disorders

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs is proposing changes to the [VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities](#) specifically pertaining to the respiratory, auditory and mental disorders body systems.

The proposed updates to the rating schedule for these conditions will enable VA to incorporate modern medical data and terminology to provide Veterans with more accurate and consistent decisions.

"Veterans who currently receive compensation for a service-connected condition in these body systems will not have their disability rating impacted when the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities is updated," said Thomas Murphy, Northeast district director, performing the delegable duties of the undersecretary for benefits. "Updating the rating schedule allows Veterans to receive decisions based on

the most current medical knowledge relating to their condition."

By incorporating modern medical data in the assessment of disabilities and how they impact earning capacity, Veterans will receive evaluations which more accurately compensate them for their service-connected disabilities. Proposed updates include:

- Modernizing the evaluative rating criteria for sleep apnea, using developments in medical knowledge to evaluate it based on its responsiveness to treatment, bringing the rating criteria for sleep apnea more closely in line with the stated purpose of the rating schedule.
- Evaluating tinnitus (ringing in the ears) as a symptom of the underlying disease which causes it, rather than as a stand-alone disability.

- Evaluating mental health conditions based on a more robust and holistic approach that assesses how impactful the disability is to cognition, interpersonal relationships, task completion, life activities and self-care. Additionally, the proposed evaluation criteria include a 10% minimum evaluation for having one or more service-connected mental health conditions and will no longer require "total occupational and social impairment" to attain a 100% evaluation.

No change to a Veteran's current rating would occur due to these proposed changes. If the proposed changes are finalized, Veterans who currently receive compensation for a service-connected condition can apply for increased compensation, but no reductions shall be made unless an improvement in the Veteran's disability is shown to have occurred.

The public has 60 days to provide comments to VA regarding the two proposed updates via the Federal Register notices located [here](#) and [here](#).

VA Will Propose Adding Rare Cancers to the Presumed Service-Connected List as Related to Military Environmental Exposure

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs intends to propose adding certain rare respiratory cancers to the list of [presumed service-connected disabilities](#) in relation to military environmental exposure to particulate matter.

VA determined, through a focused review of scientific and medical evidence, that there is biologic plausibility between airborne hazards — specifically particulate matter — and carcinogenesis of the respiratory tract, and that the unique circumstances of these rare cancers warrant a presumption of service connection.

Based on these findings, VA's Secretary is proposing a rule that will add presumptive service connection for several rare respiratory

cancers for certain Veterans.

The cancers under consideration include:

- Squamous cell carcinoma of the larynx
- Squamous cell carcinoma of the trachea
- Adenocarcinoma of the trachea
- Salivary gland-type tumors of the trachea
- Adenosquamous carcinoma of the lung
- Large-cell carcinoma of the lung
- Salivary gland-type tumors of the lung
- Sarcomatoid carcinoma of the lung
- Typical and atypical carcinoid of the lung

“This is the right decision. The rarity and severity of these illnesses, and the reality that these conditions present a situation where it may not be possible to develop additional evi-

dence prompted us to take this critical action,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “We’ll continue to hold ourselves accountable to Veterans to provide more care, more benefits and more services to more Veterans than ever before.”

VA intends to focus its rule on the rare respiratory cancers above in Veterans who served any amount of time in the Southwest Asia theater of operations and other locations. VA will invite and consider public comments as part of this process.

Once rulemaking is complete, VA will conduct outreach to impacted veterans and survivors to inform them about potential eligibility.



Roslyn Batts, a registered nurse, walked one mile to support American Heart Month during the annual Go Red for Women walk on Feb. 4. She walks every year to bring awareness to women's heart health. This is her 28th year serving Veterans at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System, Richmond campus.



Central Virginia VA Staff Don Red for Heart Health

More than 100 health care workers wore red for the Go Red for Women walk Feb. 4 at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS).

The American Heart Association's Go Red for Women initiative urges women to be involved in their heart health, as cardiovascular diseases are their greatest threat.

Ryan Ballon, employee wellness director, has led the effort at CVHCS for the past six years.

“The Go Red for Women event raises awareness of women's heart health every first Friday of February,” Ballon said. “The walk serves as a catalyst to our women Veteran population to take charge of their heart health through the simple activity of walking.”

At CVHCS, several VA programs participated in the event, including the Office of Engagement and Experience, Women's Health and Whole Health.

“I am walking today because I need the exercise, need to eat right, and need to get my heart in shape as well,” said Roslyn Batts, a nurse coordinator for Home-Based Primary Care. “I'm all about the Go Red for Women.”

Batts chooses to be proactive because she knows many heart diseases can go unnoticed.

VA is ready to support your health and wellbeing through our Whole Health approach. Find out what matters to you.

(LEFT PHOTO) Ryan Ballon, employee wellness director for the Central Virginia VA Health Care System, leads staff on a 1-mile walk to promote American Heart Month and the Go Red for Women Campaign by the American Heart Association. More than 100 health care workers wore red for the Go Red for Women walk, Feb. 4 at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System.



**DISCOVER
WHAT MATTERS**
Live Whole Health.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

LEARN MORE

Access VA on the Go With VA's Mobile App

To better serve, engage and enhance the customer experience, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making it easier for Veterans to take charge of their benefits and health care with the new mobile application, VA: Health and Benefits. The app, which can be downloaded via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store, lets Veterans access the resources they need, wherever they are, when they need them.

GET THE APP AND KEEP MOVING

Our mobile app is a smarter, more convenient way to manage VA health and benefits information. Veterans can skip login with the app by enabling face or finger ID. Veterans can also view and cancel health care appointments, view claims and appeals statuses, upload documentation, message their doctors,

locate facilities, and more — right from their phone. It also gives Veterans and their families quick access to the VA Crisis Line anytime and anywhere.

Since the app was soft-launched in August 2021, more than 210,000 users in the Veterans community have downloaded and logged into the app, and as usage grows, so will the app. New features expected in the coming year will allow Veterans to:

- Refill prescriptions
- Request appointments
- View payments and manage debt

Learn more about the service already discovered by hundreds of thousands of Veterans. VA: Health and Benefits is available via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Download today!

TELL VA WHAT YOU THINK

Our goal is to provide exceptional customer service. The VA: Health and Benefits app is a valuable tool to support Veterans' health care and benefits needs. We want to hear your ideas about the new app, how you're using it, or what could help you get started.

Contact: vaflagshipmobile@va.gov.

Our commitment to digital and IT transformation is shaped by daily dedication to customer service and the close collaboration of our workforce, managers, and leaders. Ready to join us in improving Veterans' care? Check out all current information and technology career opportunities on DigitalVA. You can also contact VA's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer at 512-326-6600, Monday through Friday, 7:00am to 5:00pm CST, or by

VA Funding Available to Create Technology Helping Eligible Service Members and Veterans Adapt Their Homes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs has [Specially Adapted Housing Assistive Technology](#) grants available for fiscal year 2022 to develop new technologies that enhance the ability of seriously disabled service members and Veterans to live more independently.

VA encourages researchers, organizations and individual technology developers to apply for SAHAT grant funding via [Grants.gov](#) by 11:59pm ET, March 11, to develop specially adapted housing-assistive technologies that will improve the livability of Veterans' adapted residences.

VA issues the Notice of Funding Opportunity in the Federal Register to foster competition among technology developers, funding innovation that will best serve the needs of

certain seriously disabled service members and Veterans.

Since 2016, when VA awarded its first SAHAT grant, VA has awarded 22 grants. To date, these grants have resulted in the introduction of new products to the accessibility industry used to improve the lives of Veterans, including:

- AI-powered mobile scanner and reader enabling blind and visually impaired users to read text independently.
- Smart guidance: a customized disability-adapted bathroom module designed to bring users closer to independent living by providing a safer bathroom environment and permitting home care.
- Robotic overbed table for beds, recliners

and wheelchairs allowing users to independently deploy, position and store mobile devices using accessible switches, or a remote from a bed or chair.

"Awarding up to \$200,000 per grant to develop technology will ultimately help make homes more livable for seriously disabled service members and Veterans," said Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Mike Frueh. "In addition to the SAHAT program, VA also administers [Specially Adapted Housing grants](#) to eligible service members and Veterans with certain serious service-connected disabilities to purchase or adapt a home that suits their individual needs."

To learn more about SAHAT, visit [VA.gov](#) and [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#).

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 | 888-878-6890
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

VISN 6 Newsletter

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Questions or comments about the newsletter, email stephen.wilkins2@va.gov or call 919-956-5541

VISN 6 EDITORIAL

Paul S. Crews // VISN 6 Network Director
Tara Ricks // Director of Communications
Steve Wilkins // Editor

PRODUCTION TEAM

Fanning Communications
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DeAnna Clark // Graphic Designer
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