

VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



100 Years OF SERVICE



Inside This Issue

By Scott Pittillo | CHARLES GEORGE VAMC

- 3 Hampton Ribbon Cutting Marks Opening of New or Suites
- 4 Dudley appointed McGuire Acting Associate Director
- 5 100 Year of Service (Continued from page 1)
- 6 Bazemore Takes Fayetteville VA Health Care System Helm
- 7 McGuire Hosts Legal Clinic For Veterans
- 8 100 Percent Better Off
- 9 Walk, Parachute Team Demo, Information Fair Bring Awareness to Suicide Prevention

Asheville's Charles George VA Medical Center cut the ribbon on its new Veterans Hope and Recovery Center for Mental Health, Oct. 26.

Ribbon cuttings symbolize a fresh start, which is especially poignant in this case, because the building on which they were cutting the ribbon was nearly as old as the tradition, which can be traced back to the late 1800s.

While the ceremony marked the opening of the Veterans Hope and

Recovery Center, it also marked 100 years of service to Veterans in Western North Carolina at the Charles George VA Medical Center. The Army built it for World War I Veterans, focusing on respiratory diseases like tuberculosis and injuries from chemical warfare.

Not much remains of the original campus. But for proof that 100 years is a long time, take a walk on the small trail just beyond the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

(Above Photo) From left to right, CGVAMC Facility Management Service Chief Robert Cornell, VISN 9 Director Cynthia Breyfogle, CGVAMC Director Stephanie Young, CGVAMC Mental Health Chief Carol Rivers, VISN6 Director DeeAnne Seekins and NCDNCR Restoration Specialist Jennifer Cathey prepare to cut the ribbon on the Veterans Hope and Recover Center at the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville on October 26, 2018. (Photo: Rodney Doty)

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 5



Message from the Network Director

It was such an honor to join Asheville's Director Steph Young and former director, Cynthia Breyfogle to celebrate Asheville's new mental health outpatient clinic and 100 years of serving Veterans in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

It was amazing how many patients, staff members and congressionals celebrated with the facility, despite the cold weather and constant rain – it truly showed how important this clinic and years of service means to the community.

Whenever we open a building or recognize how long we have been serving Veterans, it's the staff that are the true super stars. Through Mrs. Breyfogle and now under Ms. Young's leadership, staff have been working hard to make what was once a dream for our Veterans a reality.

I always find it amazing when we can take a structure that has been abandoned, and honestly, kind of pushed to the side, and transform it into something that is a symbol of strength and healing.

In Asheville, and around the VA, we don't just transform abandoned buildings – we use them to help our Veterans transform. We help our Veterans heal and become strong again. And we stay with them on that journey to health throughout their lives. It's a mission of honor.

The grand opening and 100-year celebration was a defining moment in VA's and in the U.S. Army's history.

In March of 1918, the 400-acre land was acquired by the U.S. Army because the leased hospital space, mainly used for tuberculous patients was no longer functional.

By fall of that same year, 200 buildings and 500 beds later, what looked to be a small village, was built to care for our great soldiers wounded in WWI. And here we are today, celebrating 100 years of service.

A lot has happened in 100 years, and a lot has changed since 1918. Let's take a walk down memory lane, shall we....

In 1918, modernization of the post office was in full swing with the first attempt for 'air mail' which failed the first time – but they finally got it right and we can get our mail sometimes same-day. And course, we now have email and text if we can't get a traditional letter out.

Around the world, the flu pandemic killed 50 million people. Sometimes people only lived for 2 days, once acquiring the flu. It wasn't until 29 years later that vaccinations for the flu became available. – it's amazing how medicine has changed.... Quick PSA: get your flu shot today at VA or Walgreens (for Veterans)!

Women in the work force grew substantially. Women not only worked as clerks or in a factory job to help with all the soldiers being deployed, but more than 20,000 women volunteered to serve as nurses in the Army and Navy. In that same period, in 1919 Congress passed a constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote, and sent it to states, who ratified it in 1920.

There was so much transformation during this time. Not only with the world, but with VA too.

Transformation and modernization is a huge part of VA's current priorities. The idea is to keep moving forward, keep finding new ways

to serve our Veterans, keep transforming to best meet their needs. And Asheville's celebration of a 100 years with a grand opening of their new modernized mental health facility shows that we are doing just that – keeping our promise.

Celebrating 100 years of service in Asheville, also known as Army Hospital Number 19 – we also hail the opening of the Veterans Hope and Recovery Center as an Outpatient Building for Mental Health. Not only does it align with the VA's priority to modernize, but it is close to the main hospital, to help our clinical teams work together in sync to serve our Veterans.

Each year, we serve 8,000 Veterans in our outpatient clinic for Mental Health. That is 8,000 people in this area, that are saying 'yes' to what we call 'brain health'. They come to us wanting this care, and we are responsible to deliver – and in a big way. It also shows that our employees do just that with our 5-Star and Best Place to Work ratings.

We, as a community and as a system, have a huge responsibility: take care of our Veterans' health. Especially when it comes to their mental health; times get hard, and we all need people to talk to and support us while we are on our journey. And other times it's all about maintaining a whole and healthy life.

Thank you again to our employees for all your hard-work and dedication; and allowing me to participate in this amazing celebration. And thank you to our Veterans for trusting us for 100 years to serve you and keep our promise to you in the Asheville community.



Staff from each of the seven VISN 6 medical centers gathered at the Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network Office Oct. 30-Nov. 1 for a three-day Health Eligibility Center (HEC) Academy. The course was taught by John King and Karen Sanders from the Member Services Team in Atlanta. Participants learned the latest Veteran Eligibility requirements, how to complete the application process for veteran enrollment, special eligibility factors, and how to treat Veterans needing emergency mental health treatment when their discharge is other than honorable.

Dudley appointed McGuire Acting Associate Director



James W. Dudley Jr. has been named Acting Associate Director for the Richmond VA Health Care System.

Mr. James W. Dudley Jr. became the Acting Associate Director for the Richmond VA Health Care System, effective Monday, Oct. 29, 2018.

Dudley Jr. has served as the Chief Engineer at the McGuire VA Medical Center since Feb. 4, 2007. He is responsible for facility operations and project management at McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., and four Community Based Outpatient Clinics. He also aids in strategic planning and capital improvements of the Medical Center.

He has been certified as a Fellow Level Mentor and has served as a preceptor for numerous Technical Career Field (TCF) engineers to help grow future leaders. While at Richmond, Dudley has served in roles as Acting Police Chief and Acting Associate Director, and prior to arriving in Richmond, has also held positions at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and the Providence VA Medical Center. He is a graduate of South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Lombardo is Acting Director at Richmond VA HCS



Alan Lombardo, FACHE, has been named acting director of the Richmond VA Health Care System.

VISN 6 Director DeAnne Seekins announced the appointment of Mr. Alan Lombardo, FACHE, as the Acting Director for the Richmond VA Health Care System, effective Monday, Oct. 29, 2018.

Mr. Lombardo was appointed as the Associate Director of the VA Medical Center, Richmond, Va. on March 20, 2016. He was previously appointed as the Acting Associate Director on Dec. 1, 2014, and Assistant Director on Dec. 1, 2013. Prior to this, he served as the Executive Assistant to the Medical Center Director and Chief of Staff from 2011 to 2013.

Mr. Lombardo received his Bachelor of Science degree from Slippery Rock University in 1998. In 2002, he completed his Master of Science in Physical Therapy degree at Shenandoah University. In 2011, he received both a Master of Healthcare Administration degree and a Master of Business Administration degree from Baylor University. Early in 2014, he achieved the Fellow status for the American College of Healthcare Executives.

100 Years OF SERVICE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 1

building, beside the new Center. Taking a left on the trail leads to Bull Mountain, rising gradually behind the campus.

The original structures went all the way to the top of the mountain. But now there is barely a trace of them, except for some old masonry buried in the vines, and the original water tank hidden among the trees. Nature has completely reclaimed the area. But the mission to serve Veterans remains the same.

“The healing legacy of these grounds has endured the test of time, and our new Veterans Hope and Recovery Center will ensure future Veterans will benefit from the care and service offered here,” said medical center Director Stephanie Young. She pointed out that the two-year project was a collaborative effort between the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the Charles George management team.

It’s hard not to feel the presence of time looking at the beautifully renovated building that stands out in sharp contrast to the modern stylings of most health care facilities and most of the speakers at the ceremony spoke to it.

“As we heard about this building being really abandoned, pretty much pushed aside, think about the transformation it’s gone through. That is always the amazing thing

about the VA; we can transform a building so that we can transform lives. Because our Veterans sacrificed for us, we need to be there [for them]; we need to be that beacon of hope,” said VISN 6 Director DeAnne Seekins.

Like people, old buildings have a personality. It has simply been known as “Building 9” since it was built for a nurse’s dormitory in 1930, and the building has seen its share of transitions. If these walls could talk they would no doubt have a lot to say.

“From Nursing Dormitory, to the main character in ghost stories, a destination for historians, maybe some paranormal investigators, a few horror film directors, maybe some thrill seekers, maybe the JC haunted house for a few trick-or-treaters — it could have been a local party house for the fine upstanding youth of Asheville. I just don’t know. But again, there were many uses for the building,” former Charles George VAMC director, now VA Mid-South Network (VISN 9) Director Cynthia Breyfogle joked about some evolving uses she could neither confirm or deny, since original construction. Breyfogle had begun the renovation project.

In 2015, the building was condemned. A small pine tree had notoriously sprouted on one of its chimneys, and the slate roof leaked in many places. Many considered it an



A Cherokee Indian Historical Reenactor honors the ceremony with a dance at the Hope and Recovery Building Ribbon Cutting

eyesore, rather than an asset. However, old Building 9 had a friend in the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources next door, persistently advocating for the building’s restoration.

Looking forward to the continuing usefulness of the structure, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Restoration Specialist Jennifer Cathy declared, “The State Historic Preservation Office and Department of Cultural Resources is proud to have assisted in this effort.”

For years, mental health services at the Asheville VA have been provided in temporary modular buildings at the front of the medical center. While serviceable, these structures drew complaints from many Veterans. For many, the Veterans Hope and Recovery Center is a validation of the VA’s commitment to Veterans’ mental health. For them, the occasion was more than a ribbon cutting. It was a welcome home.

The Veterans Hope and Recovery Center has a long and fascinating history.



Bazemore Takes Fayetteville VA Health Care System Helm

Dr. Webster (Carl) Bazemore will become Acting Director for the Fayetteville VA Health Care System Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2018.

Bazemore, a retired Navy Captain, has been the VISN 6 Medicine Service Line Lead since July 2018. He moved to the position from the Charles George VA Health Care System, where he served as the Chief of Staff from 2014 to 2018. Prior to that appointment and since 2008, he has served as a staff pulmonary/critical care intensivist and Medical Director of the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU), after being in private practice since 1989.

Bazemore received his Bachelor's Degree from Duke University, and his M.D. from Emory University. While on active duty, Dr. Bazemore completed his internship, residency and fellowship at the Naval Hospitals in Portsmouth, Va., and San Diego, Calif.



Dr. Webster (Carl) Bazemore assumes the responsibilities of Acting Director for the Fayetteville VA Health Care System Nov. 13.

Brandecker Moves to VISN 21 LEADS SEVERAL VISN LEADERSHIP CHANGES



The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management welcomed Mr. John A. Brandecker, MBA, MPH, to the role of Network Director, VA Sierra Pacific Network, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21, Oct. 28, 2018.

Brandecker will have executive oversight of seven VA Health Care systems in Northern and Central California, Nevada, Hawaii, Philippines and U.S. Territories in the Pacific Basin, eight co-located Community Living Centers, and 59 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and manage an operating budget in excess of \$3.9 billion.

Since 2013 Mr. Brandecker has served as Medical Center Director of Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center with responsibility for overseeing the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., and four Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Charlottesville, Emporia, and Fredericksburg, Va., that offer significant inpatient and outpatient services with a focus on inpatient polytrauma care and rehabilitation, spinal cord injury and cardiac transplantation, and provides care to nearly 60,000 Veterans in a 52-county area with more than 3,600 employees.

He holds a Masters of Public Health from Columbia University, a Master of Business Administration from St. John's University, and a Bachelor of Science degree from State University of New York.



Outgoing Richmond VA medical center director, John A. Brandecker, poses for a selfie with Cassandra Wilson and Regina Wallace from the Richmond VAMC Emergency Department during a farewell event Oct. 2. Brandecker assumed new duties as VISN 21 Director October 28.



100 Percent Better Off

Former Marine Bill Ashworth says that his sister is his inspiration. “She was diabetic, and she really wanted me to take better care of myself,” he says. “She helped me get started with TeleMOVE!®.” When she passed away unexpectedly last summer, Bill knew he owed it to her to stay on the path to better health.

He returned his Health Buddy® device to the Durham (NC) VAMC in July 2011, and staff there transitioned him to MOVE!® group care. He had already shed some of his 304 pounds via TeleMOVE!, but was facing some serious challenges. Bill hadn’t exercised since his discharge in 1964, and he loved to eat. “I would get a fast food dinner, and then eat a pizza in front of the TV,” he explains.

“I tell Veterans that they would be 100 percent better off if they take the weight off!”

Former Marine Bill Ashworth encourages his fellow Vets to do what they can to remove excess weight.

BIG CHANGES

Bill started group care in August 2011 and attacked his weight problem with walking and healthier eating. “I started walking 2 times a week for 15 minutes each. Now, I do almost 6 miles per day, despite having had double knee replacement,” he says. Bill also radically changed what he eats (“skinless poultry, frozen vegetables, no fried foods”) and started using a “super wave” oven and special serving plate to improve and control his diet. MOVE! care and these lifestyle changes worked: By September 2011, he was already down to 270 pounds!

CONFIDENCE

Earlier this year, Bill began taking orlistat to enhance his weight loss, and by April, had lost a total of 70 pounds. Bill’s cholesterol numbers and blood pressure have also improved, and on “lucky Friday the 13th,” he was taken off his blood pressure and cholesterol medications. “I tell Veterans to talk to their provider and get with the program,” he says. “I still have more weight to lose, but MOVE! has given me the confidence to take it off and keep it off.”

VISN 6 Network Director DeAnne Seekins receives her annual flu shot. VA encourages Veterans to receive the inoculation because the current 2018-2019 flu season may be just as dangerous as last year’s. To make it easier for Veterans to get a flu vaccination, VA has made two methods for getting a no-cost flu vaccination available to Veterans nationwide. Flu shots will continue to be given at all VA Medical Centers and Community Based Outpatient Clinics for free. A Veteran simply needs to ask their primary care physician for the vaccination when they visit. Or, a Veteran may choose a no-cost vaccination through the VA/Walgreens partnership within the Retail Immunization Program by visiting any of the 8200 Walgreens pharmacies nationally through the VA’s Retail Immunization program. Veterans simply need to visit a Walgreens pharmacy, and present their Veterans Health Identification Card and one other form of photo ID to receive a vaccination.





Walk, Parachute Team Demo

Information Fair Bring Awareness to Suicide Prevention

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — To help bring awareness to suicide prevention, VA's top clinical priority, the Fayetteville VA Suicide Prevention Team held a Suicide Prevention Walk and Veterans Information Fair Oct. 17 at Fayetteville VA Health Care Center. The highlight of the event was a parachute jump demonstration by the All Veteran Parachute Team of Raeford, a group of retired and active military whose self-described mission is to “Remember, Honor and Serve in support of Veterans’ related interest; to showcase skill-sets acquired through military experience.”

“The Suicide Prevention Walk was meant to provide support, prevention, reduce stigma and bring awareness to the 20 Veterans a day who die by suicide,” said Fayetteville VAMC Suicide Prevention Coordinator Kendra Danzer, who, along with other members of the FVAMC Suicide Prevention Team, organized the event. “VA has identified preventing Veteran suicide as our highest clinical priority — one that will require all of government, as well as public-private partnerships, to achieve. We know that suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play in saving lives.”

The information fair was meant to highlight community mental health services and organizations that can offer support to Veterans coupled with their VA care.

The parachute team’s participation wasn’t solely about entertaining the crowd. The team was incorporated because they have a strong community presence and very personal connections to suicide and the loss associated with it. Jumping at the suicide prevention walk allowed them to bring awareness as well as honor the fallen.

Community connection is vital to VA’s effort, the suicide prevention coordinator stressed. “We know our efforts will need to reach beyond the traditional medical model of prevention,” Danzer said. “We look forward to building a more connected community of support, specifically to reach those Veterans dying by suicide who do not receive services or benefits from VA. No one organization can tackle Veteran suicide prevention alone. To save lives, multiple systems must work together to reach Veterans where they are. The FNC VAMC Suicide Prevention Team continues to be committed to this vital VA Mission.”

In addition to the Veterans Crisis Line —1 (800) 272-8255 and Press 1 — VA offers a network of support and mental health resources for all Veterans and their families and friends. Every day, more than 400 VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators and their teams, located at every VA medical center, connect Veterans with care and educate the community about suicide prevention programs and resources.

To learn more about the issue of Veteran suicide as well as VA mental health resources, please visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov, where you’ll find the latest national and state-level research.

(Photos on Left) Participants at the Fayetteville VA Suicide Prevention Walk and Veterans Information Fair Oct. 17.



VA Joins Military Spouse Employment Partnership

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) announced that it is advancing employment opportunities for military spouses by joining the Department of Defense (DOD) Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP).

MSEP is a career program connecting military spouses with more than 390 affiliated employers who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses in portable careers.

"By developing skills, knowledge, and abilities that can be used in high-demand industry sectors, military spouses — especially those who face frequent relocations — can

achieve employment continuity and increased opportunities for upward career mobility," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "BVA is committed to delivering better services to Veterans and their families, and we understand that military spouses offer unique perspectives that can help us deliver on our promise to care for Veterans."

The Board's mission is to conduct hearings and decide appeals properly and in a timely manner.

The MSEP is part of the DOD's broader Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program, which seeks to reduce the 23 percent unemployment rate experienced by military spouses and 25 percent wage gap

experienced by military wives. SECO provides education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide and offers free, comprehensive resources and tools related to career exploration; education; training and licensing; employment readiness; and career connections. SECO also offers free career-coaching services six days a week.

To learn more about SECO, visit Military OneSource or call (800) 342-9647 to speak to a SECO career coach.

For more information on the MSEP and the 350,327 active job postings for military spouses, visit <https://msepijobs.militaryone-source.mil>.

Trump Administration Announces Decline in Veteran Homelessness

Number of homeless Veterans drops 5.4% since last year and by nearly half since 2010

Veteran homelessness in the U.S. continues to decline, according to a new national estimate recently announced by U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson.

HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report finds that the total number of reported Veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018 decreased 5.4 percent since last year, falling to nearly half the number of homeless Veterans reported in 2010.

In announcing the latest annual estimate, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie and HUD Secretary Ben Carson noted that local communities are reporting reductions in the number of Veterans in their shelter systems and on their streets. View local estimates of Veteran homelessness at this link.

"The reduction in homelessness among Veterans announced today shows that the strategies we are using to help the most vulnerable Veterans become stably housed are working," said VA Secretary Wilkie. "This is good news for all Veterans."

"We owe it to our Veterans to make certain they have a place to call home," said HUD Secretary Carson. "We've made great strides in our efforts to end Veteran homelessness, but we still have a lot of work to do to ensure those who wore our nation's uniform have access to stable housing."

"In 'Home, Together,' the new federal strategic plan to prevent and end homeless-

ness, we redouble our commitment to ending homelessness among Veterans and among all Americans," said Matthew Doherty, executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. "Working together at the federal, state and local level, we can and will continue to make progress until all Americans have a stable home from which they can pursue opportunity."

Each year, thousands of local communities around the country conduct one-night "Point-in-Time" estimates of the number of persons experiencing homelessness — in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs and in unsheltered locations. This year's estimate finds 37,878 Veterans experienced homelessness in January 2018, compared with 40,020 reported in January 2017. HUD estimates among the total number of reported Veterans experiencing homelessness in 2018, 23,312 Veterans were found in sheltered settings, while volunteers counted 14,566 Veterans living in places not meant for human habitation.

HUD also reports a nearly 10 percent decline among female Veterans experiencing homelessness. In January 2018, local communities reported 3,219 homeless female Veterans compared with 3,571 one year earlier.

The decrease in Veteran homelessness can largely be attributed to the effectiveness of the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, which combines permanent HUD rental assistance with case management

and clinical services provided by the VA. HUD-VASH is complemented by a continuum of VA programs that use modern tools and technology to identify the most vulnerable Veterans and rapidly connect them to the appropriate interventions to become and remain stably housed.

Last year alone, more than 4,000 Veterans, many experiencing chronic forms of homelessness, found permanent housing and critically needed support services through the HUD-VASH program. An additional 50,000 Veterans found permanent housing and supportive services through VA's continuum of homeless programs. To date, 64 local communities and three states have declared an effective end to Veteran homelessness, creating systems to ensure that a Veteran's homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time. For a map of the communities that have ended homelessness, go to this link.

HUD and VA have a wide range of programs that prevent and end homelessness among Veterans, including health care, housing solutions, job training and education. More information about VA's homeless programs is available at VA.gov/homeless. More information about HUD's program is available here. Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless should contact their local VA Medical Center and ask to speak to a homeless coordinator or call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838).

