

the link

December
2011



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



**plans for the new
hospital released 8**



Greetings! This is the time of year that can easily wreak havoc on our personal health. The holidays can bring stress into our lives in many ways. Making plans to see family and attend extra events at work and at home can cumulatively add stress. It is often natural the first items in our daily schedule to go are those that attend to our own well-being.

My challenge to you is to take a moment or two to think about, and plan for, how you will work toward maintaining your overall well-being during these busy times. Don't forget about the NWI employee wellness coaches – Quin Kelly and Laura Mader. They can provide you with some thoughts and activities to incorporate into the next few weeks. Contact Quin Kelly in Omaha at ext. 5972 or Lincoln at ext. 7902. Laura Mader is the wellness coordinator for Grand Island. Contact Laura at ext. 2081.

I hope you all have heard the news that a new director, Dr. Marci Mylan, was announced. She will be coming to NWI from the Minneapolis Health Care System; she brings a great deal of experience and enthusiasm. I'm looking forward to welcoming her to NWI in January 2012. What a wonderful way to begin a new calendar year.

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AND PUBLISHER**
Nancy Gregory, FACHE

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Cover: VA released the new schematic design Nov. 10 for its new medical center in Omaha, Neb. Graphic courtesy of Leo A. Daly | NBBJ.

“Each act of service we provide to the Veterans we serve demonstrates heartfelt gratitude for their sacrifice for our country.”

Linda Twomey | Mental Health Specialty Services Program Manager-Omaha



Photo By Will Ackerman



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This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWHCS). Contents of The Link are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office.

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Have a story idea? Call the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office; Will Ackerman at 402-995-4719, Anna Morelock at 402-995-5547, or email vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Link welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not contain any libelous statements or personal accusations. Letters accepted for publication must include the writer's full name and phone number. Letters may be edited for space, but never for content. Email letters to vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

meet

tia whalum

Learning Resources Student | Omaha
Studying Nursing at Clarkson College
and Biblical Studies at Grace University

Q: How long have you been at NWIHCS?

A: "Since May 2010."



Q: What do you do in your position?

A: "I teach basic life support classes to the doctors and nurses that need to be recertified. I help out with Medical Media. You'll see me walking around hanging up elevator poster signs and changing bulletin boards in the pharmacy lobby. I also help out getting certificates and brochures for people going to training."

Q: What's your favorite thing about your job?

A: "My co-workers. Coming to work and loving everyone you work with is a big deal. I've had jobs where that wasn't the case, so it's refreshing."

Q: After nursing school what would you like to do?

A: Work at the VA, whatever state that may be in. I couldn't imagine working anywhere else in Omaha. They offer great benefits for their employees and there's mobility here. I can dabble and dabble in everything. Being a new nurse, you just want to get your hands into everything, and you can do that here. 📍

Surviving the

HOLIDAYS

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs



oodies abound over the holidays. Family gatherings, work parties, outings with friends –opportunities to overeat are everywhere.

"Some people use the holidays as an excuse to throw caution to the wind and overindulge," said Kelli Stott, RN and NWIHCS Health

Promotion Disease Prevention program manager. "Then, when January comes, they step on the scale or look at their credit card statement and think, 'Why did I do that?' The main thing to remember this holiday season is to resist the urge to 'over' – overeat, overspend, etc."

While it's okay to indulge a little during the holiday season, eating well is important to maintain a healthy weight and help reduce stress levels. Many people tend to overeat when under stress and the holidays certainly can be a stressful time. Here are some tips to help manage your stress over the holidays.

Remember to:

Eat regularly– Don't starve yourself before a party in anticipation of a big meal. Arriving hungry will tempt you to eat everything in sight.

Eat balanced meals– Add some fruits and vegetables to your plate along with the rich, high-calorie foods.

Just say no– It's okay to turn down food or drink. If you aren't hungry, don't stuff yourself.

Leave what you don't want– When you feel full, stop eating. It's okay to leave food on your plate. 📍

Do

Have realistic expectations
Take time for yourself
Remember you can't control other people's behavior or certain situations

Keep extra gifts, such as gift cards, on hand for unexpected guests

Don't

let your emotions or stress get the best of you

Be afraid to try something new or start a new tradition

Feel guilty about saying "no" to some of your holiday invitations

TRY TO BUY HAPPINESS WITH AN AVALANCHE OF GIFTS

For more information on healthy living, visit the VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at www.prevention.va.gov.

Honoring those who have

SERVED

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

VETERAN'S FAMILY DEDICATES BENCH

the family of World War II Veteran Raymond Mooney commissioned a bench that is now located in front of the Holdrege VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic.

Mooney was well-known around Holdrege for his selfless giving and willingness to help with anything that needed completed. He used to farm the land where the Holdrege CBOC is located.

The Mooney family donated the bench to honor their father and all Veterans who enter the Holdrege CBOC.

A dedication ceremony was held Oct. 25 at the clinic, which was attended by VA staff, representatives from Sens. Mike Johanns' and Ben Nelson's offices, as well as the mayor of Holdrege. 



Photo By Will Ackerman

Leonard Mooney (back), Novita Negaley (left) and Peggy Hickman dedicated a bench to honor their father Raymond Mooney and all the Veterans who enter the Holdrege CBOC.

Bellevue Veterans Parade

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

Employees from the Omaha VA Medical Center, Bellevue Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and the Lincoln Vet Center joined together to represent the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Nebraska's Official Veterans Parade in Bellevue Nov. 5.

This is the first year the VA has participated in the parade to increase awareness about the services available. Employees handed out brochures about VA services while their children handed out candy to people along the parade route.



Photo By Will Ackerman

leads to a life of service

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

AFTER 30 YEARS OF SERVICE, MONSIGNOR RICHARD WOLBACH RETIRES

early every morning, Monsignor Richard Wolbach walked through the hallways of the Omaha VA Medical Center.

Quietly, he sought out Veterans who were inpatients. At 6 a.m., many patients were sleeping.

But for Steve Beauchamp, a U.S. Army Veteran, who was an inpatient with a bacterial infection, Wolbach's early morning presence was "like a light in the darkness."

After Wolbach provided Beauchamp Holy Communion at his bedside, the Veteran said, "Monsignor is the highlight of my day."

By 7:30 a.m., Wolbach had spent two hours in his office doing administrative work, made his daily visits to patients like Beauchamp and presided over the daily 6:55 a.m. Catholic mass in the medical center chapel.

This was Wolbach's daily routine for 25 years as the chief of Chaplain Services at the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, until his retirement Oct. 31. However, at a spritely 86 years old, he is taking a much-deserved retirement. ▶

▶ Although he didn't talk about it much, the former U.S. Marine has had own story of service and heroism that helped him relate to the Veterans he visited with.

Wolbach joined the Marines in 1943 and trained as a communications specialist. He landed with the sixth wave on the beaches of Iwo Jima in World War II Feb. 19, 1945. Wolbach said he and the other Marines on his landing craft were all tense as they approached the shore.

"We could see where the landing area was being mortared by the Japanese," he said. "It was kind of scary going in." ▶

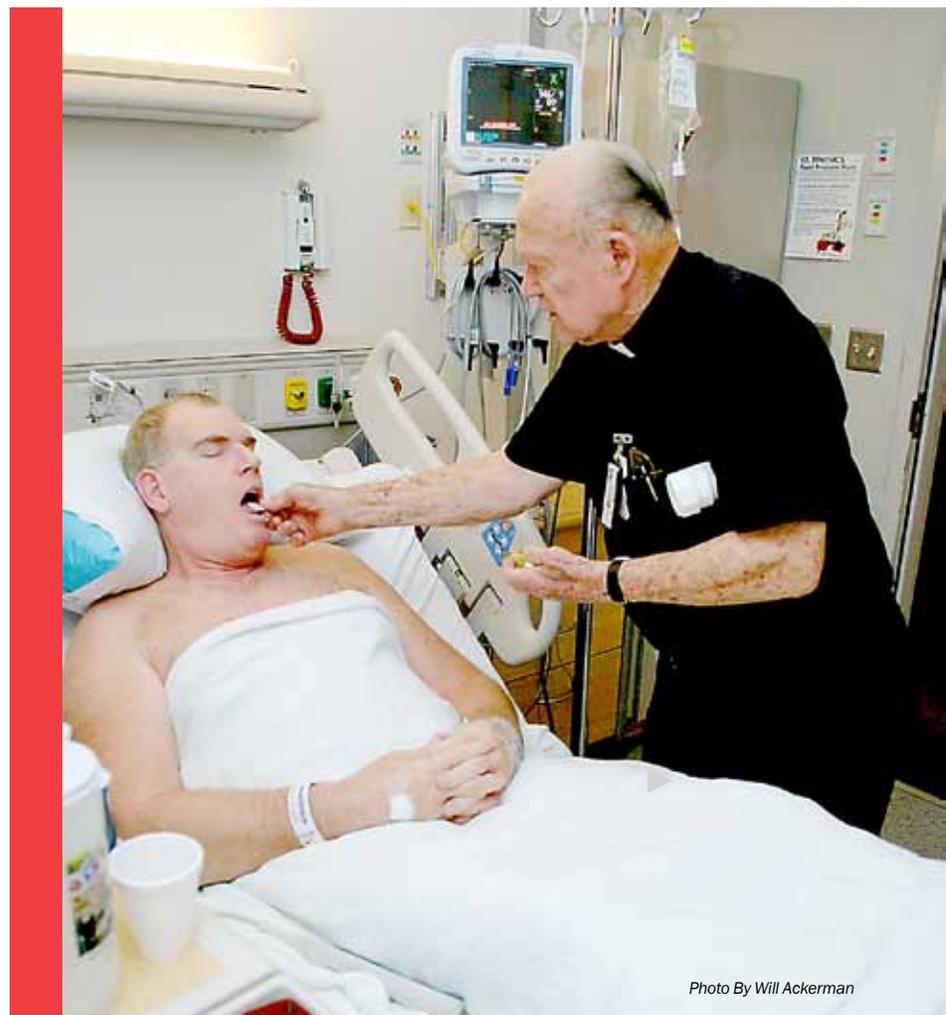


Photo By Will Ackerman

Monsignor Richard Wolbach administers Holy Communion to U.S. Army Veteran Steve Beauchamp during an early-morning visit at the Omaha VA Medical Center. Wolbach visited patients every day during rounds at the medical center. Wolbach retired Oct. 31 as chief of Chaplain Services for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

► There was no shoreline. Iwo Jima was a volcanic island. Consequently, when he and his fellow Marines left the boat, Wolbach said, “we couldn’t move quickly because we would sink into the volcanic ash.”

In addition, the Marines faced machine gun fire from the enemy that killed many of their buddies around them. But this didn’t stop Wolbach. He had a job to do, laying communication lines for his officers to coordinate attacks. Even though he faced mortal danger at age 20, Wolbach said his strong Catholic upbringing gave him strength during a moment when he needed it most.

“During my youth years, I developed an understanding that God is good, and he would protect me. You carried that with you.”

**Monsignor Richard Wolbach,
Chief Chaplain Services**

It was during that time he made a promise.

“I figured if I was going to be spared, (serving God) would be a good way to show my gratitude,” Wolbach said.

After he left the service in November 1945, Wolbach took a couple of years off before entering college in 1947 and completed four years of seminary school. He was ordained in 1956 as a Roman Catholic priest in his native Omaha. Wolbach served as a pastor and associate pastor at seven community churches in Nebraska.

He entered full-time service as the Catholic chaplain at the Omaha VAMC in January 1986. Before that, for about five years part time, Wolbach helped the Omaha VAMC chaplain, Father Edward Youngsen, who was having health problems.



Photo By Will Ackerman

Monsignor Richard Wolbach presides over the 6:55 a.m. daily Catholic Mass at the Omaha VA Medical Center chapel. Wolbach retired Oct. 31 as chief of Chaplain Services for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

At that time, the Catholic chaplain’s position was only part time. However, the hospital served nearly 500 inpatients.

“The hospital administrator worried that something might happen if (Father Youngsen) got ill,” Wolbach said.

Although Wolbach’s approach to ministry has not changed much over the years, the environment has. Today, a patient might share a room with another Veteran. In 1986, there was an open-bay concept, with up to 40 double beds separated by curtains. He said the psychiatric ward also was much larger.

During his inpatient visitation rounds, Wolbach said he never knew what the conversation might hold.

“The Veteran’s interest changes based upon the patient’s particular focal point.”

Monsignor Richard Wolbach

Although he is a chaplain, his visits were not strictly focused on discussing religion or faith. Each morning, he pulled a list of patients and identified those who were Catholic and visited with them. Chaplains John Besancon and Shane Van Dorin, who are based at the Omaha VA Medical *(continued on page 11)* ►

OMAHA MEDICAL CENTER

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs



braska-Western Iowa Health Care System officials unveiled an updated design for a replacement medical center in Omaha at 4101 Woolworth Ave. during an open house Nov. 10.

The approximately one million-square-foot medical center will include new patient units, diagnostic and treatment areas, outpatient clinics, research areas, a central energy plant and more than 1,800 parking stalls onsite. The project also will feature spaces for women's health care and mental health services.

The approximately one million-square-foot medical center will include new patient units, diagnostic and treatment areas, outpatient clinics, research areas, a central energy plant and more than 1,800 parking stalls onsite. The project also will feature spaces for women's health care and mental health services.

“This is an important milestone in our journey to build a new, state-of-the-art health care facility in Omaha where Veterans will receive exceptional health care to improve their health and well-being.”

Nancy Gregory,
Acting Director, VA NWIHCS

The project is estimated to cost more than \$560 million.

The hospital plans consist of six floors, one of which is partially below-grade but exposed to the east side to allow access to natural light and garden areas. A glass atrium, which will serve as the hospital's central spine and visual centerpiece, runs the length of the curved six-story building. ▶



The new medical center design features two parking garages, light gardens and a Veteran's memorial. Courtesy of Leo A. Daly | NBBJ.

▶ The atrium's design will allow for abundant natural light, ease of wayfinding and views of exterior gardens and outdoor space.

A series of small and large courtyards along the spine will provide outdoor access for patients and staff as part of the campus' healing environment.

Inpatient beds, diagnostic and treatment rooms, and patient and visitor parking are oriented to the east side of the concourse overlooking therapeutic gardens, Field Club and downtown Omaha.

Evidence-based design features will be used to enhance and sustain the healing environment, with attention given to infection control, privacy, design, safety and family support.

Plans call for four small buildings on the current grounds to be reused and renovated in accordance with current VA standards.

(continued on page 11) ▶

What are you thankful for this holiday season?



Cheri Twohig

LPN | Holdrege

"I'm thankful for my two children and my husband."



Dennis Hawkes

EMS | Grand Island

"I'm thankful my grandkids are healthy, and my kids are healthy, and I like my job."



Dorian Bunker

VCS | Grand Island

"Having a job, especially the way the economy is."



Patty Axtell

RN | Holdrege

"I'm thankful for our Veterans and Soldiers from Iraq coming home."



Paula Peters

Administrative Officer | Lincoln

"I'm thankful for my health, happiness and family."

legionnaire

Visits Bellevue CBOC and Omaha VAMC

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

american Legion Northeast Region Vice Commander James Hales visited VA NWIHC facilities Nov. 1 with a group of local and state legion members.

The group started learning more about NWIHC with a tour of the Bellevue Community-Based Outpatient Clinic located inside Offutt Air Force Base's Ehrling Bergquist Hospital. Led by Anne Bebee, RN, the telehealth coordinator at the CBOC, the group toured the clinic, which opened in 2009 and has more than 1,800 patients assigned. The Bellevue CBOC provides primary care, laboratory services, nursing appointments, pharmacist consultation, nutrition therapy and telehealth services.

In the afternoon, the American Legion group met with NWIHC Acting Director Nancy Gregory, Chief of Staff Dr. Thomas Lynch and other NWIHC employees for a briefing on the Omaha VA Medical Center. The group also received a tour of the building including the research area, dental and outpatient clinics. 📍



Photo By Bruce Thiel

American Legion Northeast Region Vice Commander James Hales enters Ehrling Bergquist Hospital with 55th Medical Group Deputy Group Commander Col. Dale Agner and NWIHC Acting Director Nancy Gregory. Hales was at the hospital to tour the VA clinic located inside.

HELLO

Oct. 9 to 22

Thomas Dawson,
Biomedical Engineering
Steven Gonzalez, *Fee Basis*
Sabrina Lee, *Imaging*

Matthew Hackett, *Lab*
Jodi Lakin,
Nurse Executive's Office

GOODBYE

Oct. 9 to 22

Nicklaus Reeves, *Facilities*
Monte Beaver, *Environmental
Management Service*
Rachel Mullen, *Inpatient Care*
Shelly Shannon, *Patient Care*

2011 Federal Employee Benefits Open Season

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs



It is open season for VA employees to sign up for or change their benefits.

Through Dec. 12, employees eligible for benefits may enroll, change or cancel their Federal Employees Health Benefits or their Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program.

“It’s important employees review their coverage because their plans may have changed.”

Carla LeFrancois,
Human Resources benefits specialist at NWHCS

Or, LeFrancois said, employees’ needs may have changed since they signed up for coverage. They may have had a child or started taking care of an adult parent and another plan may better fit their needs.

If employees don’t make changes to their health, vision or dental insurance, their current enrollment will continue into 2012. To compare health plans, visit www.opm.gov/insure/health/search/plansearch.asp.

To make a change to FEDVIP, the extra vision and dental insurance, visit www.benefeds.com.

To make a health insurance change to FEHB, stop in or contact Human Resources staff in Building 5 in Omaha to fill out Health Benefits Election Form SF 2809.

The Federal Flexible Spending Account program doesn’t carry over from year to year; participants must re-enroll to continue their coverage. For more information on FSAFEDS, or to re-enroll, visit www.fsafeds.com.

All Open Season FEHB, FEDVIP, and FSAFEDS actions will be effective Jan. 01, 2012.

For more information on Open Season and employee benefits, NWHCS employees may contact LeFrancois in Omaha at ext. 3261 or at carla.lefrancois@va.gov.

EVENTS what’s going on?

- Dec. 3** International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Dec. 5** International Volunteer Day
- Dec. 7** Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- Dec. 4-10** National Aplastic Anemia Week
- Dec. 4-10** National Hand-Washing Awareness Week
- Dec. 12** Benefits Open Season ends
- Dec. 20** Blood Drive, Omaha
- Dec. 22** Winter begins
- Dec. 25** Christmas Day
- Dec. 26** Kwanzaa begins
- Dec. 27** Blood Drive, Grand Island
- Dec. 31** New Year’s Eve

For more information about VA NWHCS events, visit www.nebraska.va.gov.

► *Wolbach continued from page 7*

Center, and Lonnie Logan, who is based at the Grand Island VA, visited patients of the various Protestant denominations at their facilities. However, Wolbach emphasized, VA chaplains are there for all patients, regardless of their religious beliefs.

"I always talk to all patients, regardless of faith, and ask them how they are doing," Wolbach said. "It is up to the Veterans if they state their religious preference."

"He cares about our welfare. It makes me feel stronger and improves my morale," said Carla Karcher, a U.S. Navy Veteran and Omaha VAMC employee, who was having her left knee replaced. "Veterans deserve that kind of consideration."

His ministry was not only to the patients, but "his presence was significant" for VA employees, too, said Eileen Kingston, the VA NWIHCS nurse executive. She was his immediate supervisor since 1996.

“He was there for our employees’ ups and downs and to help celebrate our successes. He would bless the nurses’ hands, which was a simple thing that had a lot of meaning.”

Eileen Kingston, VA NWIHCS Nurse Executive

Wolbach is well-known in the Omaha community, too. During community events such as the annual Memorial Day Commemoration at Omaha’s Memorial Park, he would deliver the invocation. After more than 30 years of serving Veterans and the Omaha community, Wolbach said he has no plans to slow down.

"I will now be able to do things at my leisure that I haven't been able to, including visiting with many friends in town and golfing," he said.

He has work to do on his home, which happens to be where he was born in 1925. Wolbach also plans to spend more time going to Veterans service organization meetings. He even jokes that if he can get into a little bit better shape he might go skiing.

Wolbach said he plans to continue the life of service he committed to when his life was spared at Iwo Jima by ministering part time at the VA medical center and in community. When he looks back at his life of service, Wolbach said, he is honored to have helped so many people.

"The most gratifying thing has been to lift the spirit of the Veteran," said Wolbach. ①

► *New VA Medical Center continued from page 8*

The project will be designed and constructed in accordance with LEED® Silver standards and incorporate energy-conscious design features that meet or exceed the 30-percent energy consumption savings mandated per the Energy Policy Act.

Although \$56 million was appropriated for the design and planning of the new medical center in fiscal year 2011, funding to begin construction of the new medical center must still be submitted in the VA’s future construction budget requests. ①



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of Veterans Affairs

STAND BY THEM

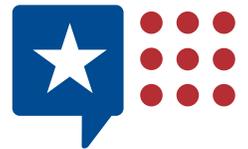
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