

the link

July
2012



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



6 Music Festival Honors Veterans



Eighty-two years ago, President Herbert Hoover issued Executive Order 5398 and set into motion the second consolidation of federal Veterans programs by merging the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (1865), Pension Bureau (1810 c.) and Veterans Bureau (1921) into a new entity known as the Veterans Administration.

In 1989, the Veterans Administration became known as the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For Civil War Veterans, the government's goal was to provide Veterans with a permanent home and lifelong care in a domiciliary setting. During the first consolidation of Veterans resources in 1921, the emphasis shifted to providing short-term specialized medical treatment and rehabilitation so Veterans could return to work, home and their families as soon as possible.

While our models of Veteran care have changed, the basic mission to honor our nation's Veterans through services to them has remained the same. Today at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, we eagerly look to the future and will provide Veterans with the exceptional health care they deserve.

We will continue to strive to be a health care leader in our communities and experts in caring for medical conditions caused by time in service. Opportunities for growth in rural areas of Nebraska and western Iowa abound. Our goal is to serve our Veterans in rural as well as urban areas. Through telehealth, community and home-based primary care programs, we can achieve that vision.

Quality, safety and customer service are the strengths we can build upon.

At NWIHCS, we expect to grow. As we focus on that journey, we invite all of our Veterans and employees to travel with us, share their thoughts along the way and help us shape the NWIHCS of the future.

Marci Mylan

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Photographer | Bruce Thiel
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FACT: WHAT DO THE COLORS OF THE FLAG STAND FOR? RED: HARDINESS AND VALOR. WHITE: PURITY AND INNOCENCE. BLUE: VIGILANCE, PERSERVERNACE AND JUSTICE.

Cover: Chief Warrant Officer 3 Brian L. Anderson leads the Nebraska Army National Guard's 43rd Army Band June 23 during the Veterans Freedom Music Festival in Lincoln. Photo by Bruce Thiel.



Happy first birthday to The Link.

The Link staff holds up a year's worth of editions. Becky Brown, Will Ackerman (sitting), Bruce Thiel and Anna Morelock produce the monthly publication.



Meet an Employee | Patient-Centered Care Grapevine



Veterans Forums: Listening to Veterans



Veterans Freedom Music Festival and Welcome Home Event



A+Mazing Employees of VA NWIHCS



VA Views | The Link Celebrates a Year of Information



New Help Desk for My HealthVet



This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS). 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 NWIHCS Public Affairs Office.

CONTACT US

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

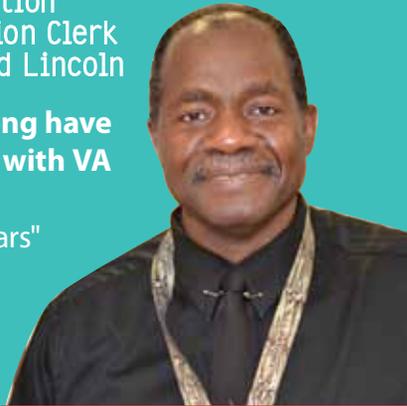
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Scan with your smart phone to view more issues of The Link online.



meet dale banks

Medical Administrative Assistant,
Compensation
and Pension Clerk
Omaha and Lincoln



Q: How long have you been with VA NWIHCS?

A: "Five years"

Q: What does your job entail?

A: "Compensation and pension involved in scheduling and coordinating Veterans for their compensation and pension appointments, which gets them evaluated for their disability benefits. I work in both facilities – Lincoln and Omaha. Right now we're on a two-month rotation, so I work in Lincoln for two months and then Omaha for two months. Same capacity: same job. And also, it's a secondary element, a lot of Veterans do live west of Omaha and Lincoln is more convenient."

Q: What's your favorite part of your job?

A: I like helping Veterans. First of all, I'm a Veteran, as well. I see things from a Veteran's perspective because I am one. So, I am more in tune to the needs and sensitivity of Veterans.

Q: What service were you in?

A: I was in the Air Force for 22 plus years and retired as a master sergeant.

Q: When you're not in Omaha or Lincoln, where can you be found?

A: I'm a bowler, I guess you could say. At least, I try to bowl. 🎳

Recruiting Veterans

FOR THE VA NWIHCS VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Michele O'Connor | Patient Centered Care
Training Coordinator

the past can help everyone understand where they have been and where they are headed. For the Patient Satisfaction Communications Committee, the past they are looking to capture belongs to Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Veterans.

The committee recently began recording wartime Veterans' stories to contribute to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, which preserves stories of American war Veterans and makes them accessible so future generations can hear directly from Veterans.



The Honorable Lyle E. Strom (left), a federal judge in the U.S. District Court to the District of Nebraska, has volunteered to be one of the first to record his story of service as an ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserves and Merchant Marines from 1943-1946 during World War II.

Besides telling wartime stories, the committee also is looking to gather stories about Veteran experiences with the Department of Veterans Affairs. These

recordings will be available to NWIHCS staff so they can hear directly from Veterans – a wish expressed by employees in many forums.

Interviews can last anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours and can be scheduled through the VA NWIHCS Public Affairs Office.

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The Patient-Centered Care Grapevine is a new feature to highlight patient-centered care activities and training. Watch the Daily Briefs and the Intranet for this logo.

If your department or program has a unique way of being patient-centered and wants to be featured, contact Michele O'Connor in Omaha at ext. 5809 or micheleoconnor@va.gov.

For more patient-centered care information, visit the Intranet page at vawww.nebraska.va.gov/PCC.asp.

Veterans Forum Feedback

THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION AVAILABLE

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

Each quarter, Veterans in Lincoln, Neb., gather to learn about services at the Lincoln Veterans Affairs facility and to meet with leadership.

The next Lincoln Veterans Forum will be from 6 to 7 p.m. Aug. 15 and is open to all Veterans who receive care at the Lincoln VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic at 600 S. 70th St. The past few forums have been standing-room only in the Prairie and Pioneer Rooms, so the next forum will move to the Auditorium to accommodate the crowd.

Besides educating Veterans about services and upcoming events at the facility, the forums also give Veterans a chance to interact with leadership from VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

Associate Chief of Medicine Dr. Christine Emler said hearing from Veterans at the forum is vital to helping her do her job – improving the health and well-being of Veterans. ▶



Photo by Bruce Thiel

Staff at NWIHCS encourage Veterans to participate in their health care by asking questions and sharing concerns with staff. The Lincoln Veterans Forum is one way staff can connect with Veterans.

“I see these as an opportunity to open a door between VA staff and administration and the people we are meant to serve. It gives us a way to let Veterans know what we are doing, and more importantly, a way for us to hear their concerns.”

Dr. Christine Emler, Associate Chief of Medicine | Lincoln CBOC

▶ Recent forum topics have included information about telehealth, the growth of services in Lincoln and the enhanced use lease. About half of the hour-long forum is dedicated to a presentation, while the rest of the time is open for Veterans' questions and comments.

Leaders encourage Veterans to ask questions. However, if a Veteran has a question about his or her personal care, staff members are available to speak in private to maintain patient privacy. Members of the Lincoln Veterans Advisory Council and employees from the Veterans Benefits Administration Lincoln Regional Office also regularly attend the forums to help Veterans with any questions or concerns they may have. ⓘ

Upcoming forums, all of which will be from 6 to 7 p.m. in the Lincoln Auditorium:

Aug. 15, 2012

Nov. 14, 2012

Feb. 13, 2013

May 15, 2013

Aug. 14, 2013

Veterans Freedom Music Festival

AND WELCOME HOME EVENT ATTRACT YOUNG AND OLD VETERANS

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

hundreds of community members came out to celebrate Veterans June 23 at the Veterans Freedom Music Festival at the Department of Veterans Affairs Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Lincoln, Neb.

The festival was held in conjunction with the VA NWIHCS annual Welcome Home event. The Welcome Home event has traditionally been held to provide information to Veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Today, we wanted to bring in the entire community. We wanted to educate people about what the VA has to offer.”

Lori Wardlow, VA NWIHCS Returning Veterans Program Administrative Officer



The Welcome Home event featured 63 vendors that included many aspects of VA health care and benefits. In addition, several university and college representatives were on hand to provide information about Veterans' education benefits. Various Veteran service organizations were present to share information, too.

“We partnered with the music event to make it a family environment so we could showcase what the VA is all about,” Wardlow said.

The music festival seemed like a perfect fit with the goals of the Welcome Home – to get younger Veterans out to the VA.

“We do not want them to be intimidated by the VA,” said Terry Gillespie, a former Marine who served in Vietnam and acts as the Veterans Freedom Music Festival executive director. “We wanted to open their eyes to how many services there are at the VA.”



Photos by Bruce Thiel and Will Ackerman

“I do not want to see our younger Veterans fall through the cracks. A lot of Veterans do not know that counseling and other services are available for them.”

Terry Gillespie | U.S. Marine Veteran,
Veterans Freedom Music Festival
Executive Director

The goal for the music festival was to “use music to bring people together,” Gillespie said.

The music festival featured nine area acts with genres that ranged from bluegrass to classic 60’s music. All of the groups donated their talents and time to help celebrate Veterans.

“It is the least that we could do to give back to the Veterans who do so much for us,” said Janet Jeffries, one half of the Kramer Sisters duo, which was the opening act for the event.

Three Eagles Communications’ radio personalities Dave Hilligoss, Carol Turner and Scott Kaye were emcees for the event. The day culminated with the Nebraska Army National Guard 43rd Army Band performing an hour of patriotic music. Music included marches by John Philip Sousa to the Armed Forces on Parade.

Although the VA coordinated the Welcome Home event, the music festival was produced entirely by the Lincoln VA Veterans Advisory Council and Veterans Freedom Music Festival Committee.

“The Veterans Advisory Council suggested this as an opportunity to reach out to Veterans. People attending this event will see our VA employees do care and want to make a difference.”

Dr. Christie Emler, Associate Chief of Medicine | Lincoln CBOC

Senior Airmen Travis Boroff, who is on active duty in the U.S. Air Force, said although he is not eligible for VA and other Veteran’s benefits now, “with this information, it will help me plan for the future.” 🗣️

THE *Amazing* EMPLOYEES OF VA NWIHCS

IN JUNE, SEVERAL EMPLOYEES WERE RECOGNIZED WITHIN THEIR PROFESSIONS

Pam Florea, RN, received the Spirit of Magnet Structural Empowerment Award June 21 at the Omaha VAMC.

Florea was the first to receive this award at NWIHCS. She received it for her demonstrated leadership and engagement with her peers and her community. She has been integral to the implementation of Patient-Aligned Care Teams (PACT), has been a patient and staff advocate, and coached her clinic through culture change. Florea creates a safe environment where new ideas are embraced and rewarded. She has served as a service level patient advocate, has been chair of the Ambulatory Care United-Based Council (UBC) and has been a member of a number of committees including Magnet, Ethics, Recruitment and Retention and Patient Satisfaction to name a few. She organized the Red Clinic's STAR survey, which led to real time evaluation of clinic issues

and implementation of improvements. Six staff have been mentored and oriented to their role in PACT by Florea. She also has encouraged a number of Veterans have been to attend the Patient Advisory Council.

Five times a year, nurses have the opportunity to recognize their peers through a series of Spirit of Magnet Awards including Exemplary Professional Practice; Interdisciplinary Care; New Knowledge; Structural Empowerment; and Transformational Leadership.

This quarter, nominations were submitted for the Magnet Award entitled "Structural Empowerment." The criteria for this award include demonstration of professional engagement, teaching and role development and commitment to community involvement.

Two VA NWIHCS Grand Island pharmacists received awards June 9 at the Nebraska Pharmacists Association Annual Convention in Lincoln.

Lourdes Heuermann, PharmD, was presented with "The National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations Excellence in Innovation Award," which recognizes and honors a qualified pharmacist who has demonstrated significant innovation in his or her respective practice, method, or service directly or indirectly resulting in improved patient care and/or advancement of the profession of pharmacy.

Heuermann has been with NWIHCS in Grand island for 14 years. She is the clinical pharmacist on the southwest team and is responsible for the medication therapy management. She also serves as residency preceptor and is clinical faculty with both the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Creighton University Colleges of Pharmacy.



Janelle Sellers, PharmD, and Lourdes Heuermann, PharmD, received awards at the Nebraska Pharmacists Association Annual Convention in Lincoln June 9.



Photo by Anna Morelock

Pam Florea, RN, received the Spirit of Magnet Structural Empowerment Award June 21 at the Omaha VAMC from Deb Shimerdla, RN.

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What is your favorite article or edition of the **link** from this last year?



"I like reading about what my co-workers are up to. I liked the story on Linda Twomey and the homeless program because I used to work for the homeless program."

Joe Heatherly
Social Worker | Lincoln



"I liked the last issue with the bowler, because I'm a bowler, and that made his story even more interesting."

Steve Miller
Electrician | Lincoln
U.S. Navy Veteran



"Shop with a Cop. It allowed VA NWHCS staff to see the VA Police in a different light. It showed them that we care about the community and Veterans."

Lt. Erica Obner
VA Police | Omaha
U.S. Air Force Veteran



"Shop with a Cop. It was reassuring to see that the police view their job as being more than simply on station. They helped a family in need, which is the best gift anyone can receive."

Jennifer Rutkowski
Program Support Assistant | Omaha



"I like the Director's column. I like to hear the director's take on certain issues, and her goals and vision for the organization. It puts things in perspective."

Thom Sinnette
U.S. Air Force Veteran
Compliance Officer | Omaha

The Link Magazine Celebrates

A Year of Information

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

One year ago, The Link magazine was born. The idea for a magazine evolved from the need for a communication tool to better tell the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System story.

Other products had been around for years in various formats – Mosaic, Nebraska Postings, The Messenger and NWI NewsLink. However, there was not a strategic communication product that effectively highlighted the accomplishments of employees and volunteers, or showcased the services they provided.

"The Link brings awareness and gives people an opportunity to know what is going on within NWI," said Jennifer Rutkowski, program support assistant

▶ to the associate director. "It allows us to learn what other employees in the organization are doing."

Stories range from feature profiles, such as one on 90-year-old Dr. Dan Egan, to highlights about the VA research service at the Omaha VA Medical Center, to the Patient-Aligned Care Teams throughout VA NWHCS.

Although the Public Affairs staff uses outlets

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New help desk service

available for



Veterans can now call 1-877-327-0022 (toll free) to get help resolving any problems they are having with their My HealthVet (www.myhealth.va.gov) account or if they simply have questions about VA's health care portal.

The help desk is available from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Central) Monday through Friday with the exception of federal holidays.

My HealthVet is a web portal designed to help Veterans better manage their health care. The portal offers the ability for Veterans to refill their VA prescriptions with the click of a mouse. Veterans may also view their past and future VA appointments, plus get appointment reminders sent to their personal email accounts.

Another key feature to My HealthVet is secure messaging. With secure messaging Veterans can send safe and secure electronic messages to their VA health care team. With secure messaging

Veterans don't have to wait on hold or worry about missed phone calls from their health care team.

Other features of My HealthVet include:

- View VA lab results
- Keep a personal online health record
- Tools to track various vital health statistics
- Online medical library

To sign up for a My HealthVet account Veterans should go online to www.myhealth.va.gov.



LEAVING

NEW

employees

HELLO

May 6 to June 2

Kelly Arends, *Mental Health*

Jennifer Buhrman, *Extended Care*

Jonathan Buzzell, *Fee Basis*

Patricia Collison, *Lab*

Melanie Cramer, *Extended Care*

Linda Deras, *Extended Care*

Frances Fines, *Mental Health*

Patricia Gill, *Fee Basis*

Shawna Gorman, *Business Office*

Bettie Green, *Finance*

Dexter Griffin, *Sterile Processing Service*

Franklin Huskey, *Human Resources*

Richard Lindstrom,
Veterans Canteen Service

Victoria Littrell, *Fee Basis*

Lauren McGill, *Nurse Executive's Office*

Martin Miller, *Mental Health*

Robert Morris, *Finance*

Opeyemi Oloyede, *Outpatient Care*

Maria Pachon, *Fee Basis*

Tina Parker Dawkins, *Outpatient Care*

Dana Ramos, *Extended Care*

Jason Reid, *Mental Health*

Kayce Sheppard, *Extended Care*

Jedediah Struck, *Business Office*

Jerrice Taplett, *Nurse Executive's Office*

Tina Telitz,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Brianna Thompson,
Veterans Canteen Service

Jessica Wolters, *Inpatient Care*

GOODBYE

May 6 to June 2

Sarah Aguilar, *Surgery*

Pamela Bilek, *Surgery*

Daniel Buhrman, *Police*

Carolyn Conlon, *Inpatient Care*

Janna Cornelius, *Prosthetics*

Sarah Fredrickson, *Business*

Philip Hutchinson, *Research*

Stephen Ludwig, *Research*

Britta Mitzlaff-Jensen,
Veterans Canteen Service

James Paczowski, *Police*

Julie Petersen, *Veterans Canteen Service*

Jim Pope, *Outpatient Care*

Marie Rouse, *Patient Care*

Jodene Schwisow, *Mental Health*

Alan Thorson, *Logistics*

Virginia Warner, *Business*

► *Veterans History Project continued from page 4*

In an office setting, interviewees will sit down with two volunteers who will ask questions and capture the interviews on video.

With the Veteran's permission, the interview will consist of two sections – the first on the Veteran's wartime experience to be sent to the Library of Congress. The second on the Veteran's VA experience, which will be shared with NWHCS employees. ①

To schedule an interview, contact Anna Morelock at 402-995-5547 or anna.morelock@va.gov. To learn more about the Veterans History Project, visit www.loc.gov/vets.



► *Awards continued from page 8*

Janelle Sellers, PharmD, was awarded The "Distinguished Young Pharmacist Award," a national award given annually to an outstanding young pharmacist. The pharmacist receiving this award has been out of pharmacy school less than 10 years and has demonstrated his or her leadership in the profession. Sellers is the Pharmacy Residency Program director and clinical pharmacy specialist in ambulatory care for NWHCS in Grand Island. She is also an adjunct assistant professor for the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Pharmacy and serves as a pharmacy residency program practitioner surveyor for the American Society of Health Systems Pharmacists. ①

► *The Link continued from page 9*

such as Facebook, Twitter, the NWHCS website and the news media to increase awareness about the VA mission and the dedicated people who perform it, the magazine provides a tool where the organization can proactively expand the message and recognition.

“It fills the communication gap. I always snag a magazine and read it.”

Thom Sinnette, VA NWHCS Compliance Officer

The magazine is produced in collaboration between Public Affairs and Medical Media. If you have a story idea, or comments about the magazine, contact Public Affairs at vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov or call the editor, Anna Morelock, at ext. 5547 in Omaha. ①

The magazine is available online at www.nebraska.va.gov/The_Link_A_monthly_publication_of_VA_NWHCS.asp.



EVENTS what's going on?

- July 3** Farmer's Market, Omaha
- July 4** Independence Day
- July 6** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- July 6-12** Alzheimer's Awareness Week
- July 8-14** National Therapeutic Recreation Week
- July 10** Farmer's Market, Omaha
- July 11** Farmer's Market, Lincoln
- July 17** Farmer's Market, Omaha
- July 18** Farmer's Market, Lincoln
- July 20** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- July 21** Veterans Administration Created in 1930
- July 24** Farmer's Market, Omaha
- July 25** Farmer's Market, Lincoln
- July 26** Women's Equality Day
- July 31** Farmer's Market, Omaha

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



VA NWHCS is now engaging Veterans through Twitter and Facebook



www.twitter.com/VANWHCS



www.facebook.com/NebraskalowaVA

Watch for news, patient information and upcoming events.



EXPERIENCE: Patient Knowledge

Who is the expert on Veteran health? The Veteran, of course. Health care providers at NWHCS encourage Veterans to get involved in their health care. Patients' experience with their conditions and past treatments is vital in providers seeing the whole picture. Safe and effective care comes with patients and providers work together to provide Veterans the best care anywhere.

ex·cel·lence [ek-suh-luh'ns], *n.*, **1.** the fact or state of excelling; superiority; eminence. **2.** an excellent quality or feature. **3. VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System** —Syn. **1.** preeminence. **2.** merit, virtue.



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