

the link

MAY
2013



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



A HOME
AWAY
FROM HOME
AT THE COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER

6



Looking at the content for the May edition of The Link, I see a lot of groups being recognized – the federal employees that serve Veterans each day, nurses, fallen service members and more. The piece I would like to focus on, however, is about the successes of our Veteran advisors.

In Lincoln, they are called the Veterans Advisory Council; in Grand Island, the Veterans Advisory Board; and in Omaha, the Veterans

Advisory Group. No matter what name they go by, each group fulfills an important role in our health care system.

Our Veteran advisory groups provide extra ears to listen to Veterans' ideas and concerns. They also share the compliments they receive about VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System with me and staff. I've written numerous thank you notes based on comments received by the groups.

Another role they play is to host events for Veterans that we as federal employees cannot. In Lincoln each year, the council puts together a daylong music festival to bring Veterans together to share a common joy, meet other Veterans and learn about VA services.

Our Veteran advisors round out the services at VA NWIHCS. They make sure we keep Veteran needs in the forefront of our minds. They also provide Veterans with someone to reach out to who has already learned how to navigate the VA system and can help them from the same perspective.

I would like to thank each of the volunteers who serve in these groups. They fill a vital role.

Marci Mylan

DIRECTOR AND PUBLISHER
Marci Mylan, Ph.D., MHA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
Will Ackerman

THE LINK EDITORIAL STAFF
Editor | Anna Morelock
Photographer | Bruce Thiel
Designer | Becky Brown
Writer | Kate O'Dell

FACT: MORE THAN 2.2 MILLION VETERANS NATIONWIDE ARE REGISTERED FOR MY HEALTHVET.
VISIT WWW.MYHEALTH.VA.GOV.

Cover: Nurses Linda Derras (left) and Cindee Nickel (right) use a stand-up lift to help U.S. Army Veteran, Donald Meirath, out of his wheelchair and into his recliner in his room at the Community Living Center. (Photo by Kate O'Dell)

“I’m a Veteran, and working at the VA I can help other Veterans. It’s a good feeling being able to help people. It would be like going and helping a neighbor scoop snow. It’s just something you can do to help other people, and it gives you a good feeling inside.”

Dan Loge, U.S. Army Veteran
Housekeeping Aide | Environmental
Management Service, Omaha



the link

CONTENTS

Meet an Employee | Memorial Day
Commemoration to Honor Fallen



Choosing to Serve: Employees Share their Drive



Creating A Home Away From Home



Nurses in the Combat Zone



Secure System Connects Patients and Providers Online



A Prisoner of War, One of the Few Who Made it Home



Month Celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage



Success Stories from the Veterans Advisory Group | Volunteer
Receives Award for Outstanding Contributions



Aiming for Perfection



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.

VISIT US ONLINE

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



meet

tom stearley

Registered Nurse | Ambulatory Care
Grand Island CBOC

Q: How long have you been an employee?

A: "31 years"

Q: What does your job entail?

A: "I answer the symptom-based phone line for Grand Island and other



community-based outpatient clinics. I am the employee health nurse, so I have to field any concerns about employee health. I make appointments for employee health; I organize all of the files. I keep statistics for the weekends, holidays, evenings, nights program and the symptom-based phone line. I have been the flu program coordinator for Grand Island for the past seven years. I am the nicotine replacement point of contact."

Q: What is your favorite thing about your job?

A: "Dealing with the Veterans over the phone. I'd rather have hands on, but dealing with the Veterans over the phone and being able to help them with medical questions on the phone. I like it because it is working with them, and I have to keep current with my medical knowledge so I can help them and get them the care they need."

Q: When not at work, where can you be found?

A: "There is fishing in my past and in my future. I like to go fish in Nebraska and Iowa. When the weather is nice, I go about once a week. I fish for bass, walleye, usually with night crawlers for bait. I have been married for 40 years this year. My wife comes fishing with me about half of the time. She comes along and reads while I fish. I have a daughter and a son and a grand-puppy." 🐾

VA HONORS FALLEN AMERICANS AT Memorial Day Commemoration

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

the Fifth Annual Memorial Day Commemoration will be held at 4 p.m. May 24 at the front circle of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, Omaha medical center, 4101 Woolworth Ave.



Photos by Anna Morelock



Left: VA Police Officer Ronald Freestone hands the folded flag to Officer John Torcia during the retreat ceremony at the 2012 Memorial Day Commemoration. As a member of the Navy Reserves, Torchia currently is deployed to Afghanistan.

Right: A color guard made up of Veterans from local Veteran service organizations participates in the 2012 Memorial Day Commemoration.

“We are honored on this day to pay tribute to all Americans who have given their lives in service to this nation. These brave men and women have borne the ultimate sacrifice throughout America’s history to defend our freedoms and protect our way of life.”

Dr. Marci Mylan, Director | VA NWIHCS

The event’s keynote speaker will be retired Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, Nebraska’s former adjutant general. Music will be provided by the U.S. Air Force Heartland of America Band’s Offutt Brass. The event will include a joint color guard from area Veteran service organizations, the American Legion Riders and several community organizations. A VA NWIHCS Police honor guard will perform a retreat ceremony.

In addition to this commemoration, VA invites the community to join Americans everywhere in a National Moment of Remembrance on Memorial Day, May 27, at 3 p.m. This is designated by the president as a time for all to honor America’s fallen.

Americans also are requested by a White House presidential proclamation to fly external U.S. flags at half-staff from sunrise until noon May 27. 🇺🇸

Local Veterans organizations are invited to present commemorative wreaths at the event to honor America’s fallen. To participate, contact Will Ackerman, VA NWIHCS public affairs officer, at 402-995-4719 or william.ackerman@va.gov.

CHOOSING TO SERVE: *Employees Share Their Drive*

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

Public Service Recognition Week is May 5 to 11. During this week, Americans are encouraged to recognize government employees at the local, state and federal level for their service to the nation.

It's also a time for government employees and organizations to educate the public about why they chose a life of public service, and how their work contributes to the American way of life.

VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM EMPLOYEES SHARED THEIR REASONS FOR SERVING THE PUBLIC:

RAYMOND BALL

Medical Support Assistant, PRRC | VA NWHCS, Omaha

For me, it goes back to the quote from President Kennedy, '...ask not what the country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.' I grew up in the era following, and this belief was instilled in me at a young age. I have always felt it is better to help others; and by helping my country, I feel I am accomplishing this mission. Whether it was helping to ensure our nation's defense or making sure that our Veterans who defended our freedom and values are taken care of, I feel it was my service to country and others to do the best I could to see that it was and is mission accomplished.

AMY BOYLE, BSN, RN, CNOR

Red Clinic Nurse Care Coordinator | VA NWHCS, Omaha

I believe that even if you did not serve in the military, you can still serve your country by being involved in your community. Giving of yourself to better the world is public service. In the words of JFK '...ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.' I feel it is an honor to serve our Veterans. Many are humble and play down their service. Having been in the military, I understand their sacrifice. They humble me.

TERASA CUYPERS

Medical Clerk | VA NWHCS, Holdrege

I like to think of public service as a chance to do my part in support of the greatest country on earth; a chance to emulate the ideals our country was founded on. I enjoy making a difference in our Veterans' view of the VA. I want to break the stereotype of a typical government worker.

It was important to me to become a public servant at the VA because both my father and my husband are combat Veterans. I want to do my part to make sure all Veterans are treated just like I think my family should be treated when they use VA services.

STEVE FOGERTY

Administrative Officer, Medicine Department | VA NWHCS, Omaha

To me, public service is a noble calling. It means making the public welfare a career occupation, no matter what level of government service. It reflects not only individual accomplishment, but also our core values that come into play every day we show up for work. The Veterans deserve nothing less. It is a privilege to serve them with diligence and integrity.

I consider my VA employment over the years as a source of pride and motivation. This applies not only to the Veterans we all serve but to our fellow co-workers. For nearly 30 years I have had the privilege of serving alongside some of the most dedicated, motivated and unselfish people you could ever hope to meet. Public service is often times challenging but consistently rewarding. It takes an ongoing commitment to the highest ethical standards and the ability to sustain one's core values especially during difficult social, economic and political times.



INTERESTING FACTS

More than two million public servants protect our nation through the armed forces.

Ninety-five percent of America's children are protected against major disease through vaccines administered by public employees. Thanks to the government, polio and measles have been all but wiped out in the U.S.

Herman Hollerith, a U.S. Census Bureau accountant, invented the first modern computer.

The first person to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong, was a public employee.

Two employees of the National Institute of Standards and Technology invented the neon light.

VA researchers pioneered the concepts that led to development of the CAT scan.

VA launched the largest-ever clinical trial of psychotherapy to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sources: www.publicservicerecognitionweek.org and www.va.gov

I retired from the Air Force as a medic after 21 years. I am used to the medical facility and the operation of it, and I've been in patient care for over 20 years.



Terry Hunt
Chief of Inventory Management
Omaha VAMC

I think it is an honor to work here for the Veterans. I'm a civilian and so I am honored to work at the VA. Also, it is kind of neat being able to bring all the supplies in.



Brenda Ferris
Medical Supply Inventory Manager
Omaha VAMC

(continued on page 14) ▶

creating a HOME AWAY FRO



Photo by Kate O'Dell

Arthur Jones did not expect to live more than 24 hours when he arrived at the VA Community Living Center in Grand Island this past January.

Jones, a 67-year-old U.S. Army Veteran, served in the Vietnam War. He is diabetic and neuropathy kept him from feeling pain from blisters he developed on his feet. The blisters eventually required him to undergo surgery at the Omaha VA Medical Center. A mass the size of a baseball was removed from his left foot.

After the operation, Jones was still in poor condition and requested to go to the CLC. During the ride from Omaha to Grand Island, Jones said, he made peace with the idea of passing away. "I was expecting to die, but it really didn't bother me because God and I are very good friends."

Jones stayed at the CLC three years earlier, and he loved the nurses, he said. If he was going to spend his last days in a hospital bed, he wanted to be somewhere he felt at ease. ▶

Cindee Nickel (left) and Linda Derras (right) care for U.S. Army Veteran Donald Meirath during his stay at the CLC.

"When the ambulance pulled up (to the CLC), I just had a feeling like I was coming home."

Arthur Jones | U.S. Army Veteran

▶ The CLC is staffed with more than 50 nurses and two doctors. It is equipped with 52 beds and is home for typically 40 to 45 patients at any given time. Many patients are referred to the center after joint replacements, strokes, infections and traumatic brain injuries. Staff provide ▶

M HOME

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

► services in hospice, long-term care and long-term or short-term rehab. Patients are referred from primary care, home-based primary care and other hospitals.

Medical treatment for patients in the CLC includes mental health care, dietary services, recreational, physical, occupational or speech therapy. Patients can use a barber service and receive visits from the facility's chaplain.

Veterans must qualify for care in the CLC; however, Veterans of all ages can be eligible. In 2008, the average age of a patient was 72; now that age has dropped to 68.

Lisa Cantrell, a registered nurse and the CLC nurse manager, has worked there for the past three years. Cantrell said she is privileged to supervise the staff because of their dedication to the Veterans. The staff does all the little things they don't have time to do, she said.

“I don't know where they find the time to fluff the pillow, to rub his back, to turn down the TV. You don't hear them say, 'No, I can't. I don't have the time.' They amaze me every day.”

Lisa Cantrell, RN | CLC Nurse Manager

While still in hospice, since his arrival at the center, Jones' health has improved. The care he gets from the staff at the CLC is above and beyond standards of health care, he said. Jones' closest family member, his brother, is in Indiana. The relationships he ►



Above: Nancy Schumm, RN, cares for Arthur Jones in the CLC. Schumm says she feels like the CLC functions like one big family. “You really establish good relationships with the Veterans just by taking the time to get to know them.”



Left: Donald Meirath was a VA employee in operations for 21 years and has been in hospice care at the CLC since January. He says the staff treats him like family and has never had a cross word towards him. He appreciates the care they give. “I can't take care of myself at home,” he said.

Photos by Kate O'Dell

► has with the CLC staff and other Veteran patients are important to him. The nurses treat him like family, and he appreciates the hugs and the time they take to visit with him, he said.

“The nurses here would bend over backwards,” he said. “They are just fantastic. There is no place in the world that I would rather be than here.”

Nancy Schumm, RN, said she loves her job and the people she works with. Schumm's husband is a Veteran, and so is her father. She loves coming to work every day serving those who have served, she said. “They are very appreciative of the care we give them.”

For more information about eligibility for CLC services, call a social worker at 308-382-3660 ext. 2289 or ext. 3287.

SAVING LIVES

in a combat zone

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

Nurses play a key role in our nation's history. Because of their efforts, thousands of American Servicemembers survived life-threatening wounds sustained during combat. The survival rate for a wounded Servicemember who received medical care has grown from 60 percent during the Civil War to 91 percent in Operation Enduring Freedom.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System employee, Ronda Fritz, RN, BSN, joined the Air Force in 2001 after working as a civilian nurse for two years. After four years on active duty, she continued to serve in the Air National Guard. This past year, Fritz spent seven months deployed as the chief nurse for the 651st Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Within 10 minutes of landing on the airfield where she would live in a tent during her stay, she was face down on the ground during a rocket attack. Fritz said she realized in that moment, "Dorothy, you aren't in Kansas anymore." The crew remained on high alert from that day in September until after Thanksgiving.

Fritz was responsible for more than 120 medical staff who provided transitional medical care for troops who came from the field onto the airfield. She worked within a system where she reported directly to regional commanders on a daily basis notifying them if they had enough beds to support their troops during any planned mission. Decisions were made about offensive operations based on the current capabilities to absorb any wounded at the hospital.

"They are making their defense and operational decisions based on what we can do," Fritz said.

A common phrase in her line of work was, "You never know what is over the hill." It can never be predicted what the nurses would face when the helicopter landed. It could have been one wounded Soldier, or six, or possibly an enemy who had commandeered the flight.

"Does it make you nervous and scared? Yeah it does. But I have to give it to those men and women who step outside that wire every day. They do it willingly and with confidence because they know if that bad day comes and they get hit, they know we are going to take care of them."

Ronda Fritz, RN, BSN | Air National Guard ▶



Courtesy Photo

Ronda Fritz, RN (left), deployed as a chief nurse to Afghanistan in September 2012 and returned to Omaha, Neb. in February 2013.

▶ While Fritz was gone, she was overwhelmed by the support she received from back home. She received care packages from work colleagues at VA NWIHCS and never-ending support from family and friends. The emails and Facebook messages were meaningful and kept her somewhat connected to home while she was gone, she said.

Fritz said she believes in the importance of the nurses and doctors who take care of American service members, not only overseas, but also after they return home. "You are taking care of the Veteran who was in my airplane," she said. "The message I'd love everyone to get is that if we don't take care of the patients and provide the service they expect, they will lose the confidence they have to put their lives on the line. As a nation, we can't afford for them to lose that confidence." 🗣️

Secure System Connects Patients and Providers Online



Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

When John Galde first noticed symptoms of what was finally diagnosed as multiple sclerosis, he was still working and seeing a non-VA provider in the community. If he had a question about his symptoms, he would call the provider and leave a message.

“When you can’t work, you can’t do this, can’t do that, and you don’t know why, that’s very strenuous,” said the U.S. Army Veteran who served between 1983 and 1987. “If I would go and call my doctor for an answer to a question I might have, I might not hear back for a few days if at all.”

Galde now sees Dr. Nathan Birch, a primary care provider at the Omaha VA Medical Center. At Birch’s suggestion, Galde signed up for MyHealthVet, VA’s online personal health record, which also includes a secure messaging feature that allows him to send Birch secure emails.

“I get a lot of questions that I might think of, but I’ll forget to ask him when I see him. It’s just so great when I can bounce something off of him.”

John Galde | U.S. Army Veteran

Being able to answer quick questions, especially for patients with chronic illness, is one reason Birch said he encourages patients to use the secure messaging feature. Out of his almost 400 patients, more than 62 percent of them are registered on MyHealthVet, and almost 45 percent have opted in to use the secure messaging feature.

Galde also uses MyHealthVet to refill his prescriptions, which are mailed to his home. ▶



▶ “Sign up for it,” Galde said. “I tell people this all the time. I understand if you’re only going to the VA once or twice a year, maybe it wouldn’t be beneficial for you. But, if you’re going more than a few times a year, I think it’s a great help.”

Another benefit to using MyHealthVet, Birch said, is it provides a better way to make shared decisions. When patients come into the doctor, they are often asked to make decisions on their treatment. Now, instead of being forced to make a decision right away, Birch provides the options, sends his patients home with his notes and tells them to email him.

“These are life-changing decisions,” Birch said. “People can go home; they can think about it; they can talk to others. Email gives a way to give quick and easy feedback on something like this.”

Not everything can be diagnosed via secure messaging, but once Veterans start using the system, they really like it Birch said. In the past year, Birch has responded to 2,090 secure messages and initiated almost 1,900 messages. He communicates with everyone from a 93-year-old female Veteran in a nursing home to homeless Veterans using the system.

Some of the surprising resistance is the younger Veterans, Birch said.

“They say, ‘Well aren’t you on Facebook?’ And I say, ‘Do you really want me to put that on Facebook?’”

For more information, or to register for MyHealthVet, visit www.myhealth.va.gov. To opt-in to receive secure messaging, Veterans need to take a photo identification card to the Release of Information office to have their account authenticated. Release of Information is located in Room 1201 in Omaha, Room 086 in Lincoln and Room SE117 in Grand Island. Veterans at the other community-based outpatient clinics should speak with their provider about opting in to secure messaging.

A PRISONER OF WAR:

One of few who made it home

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

Dennis Pavlik was just out of high school when he was drafted into the Army. He was sworn in Oct. 14, 1952, and arrived in Inchon, Korea the day after Easter in 1953.

"I've never seen so much filth," he said. "Small kids were taking the garbage out of the cans."

He was assigned to C Battery of the 555th Field Artillery Battalion. The unit was known as the Triple Nickel and had been on the 38th parallel for nine months. His detail was to protect the artillery. During the next weeks, his detail moved about eight times. It was mid-June when his unit was engaged in a battle with fire missions that started in the early evening and lasted all night.

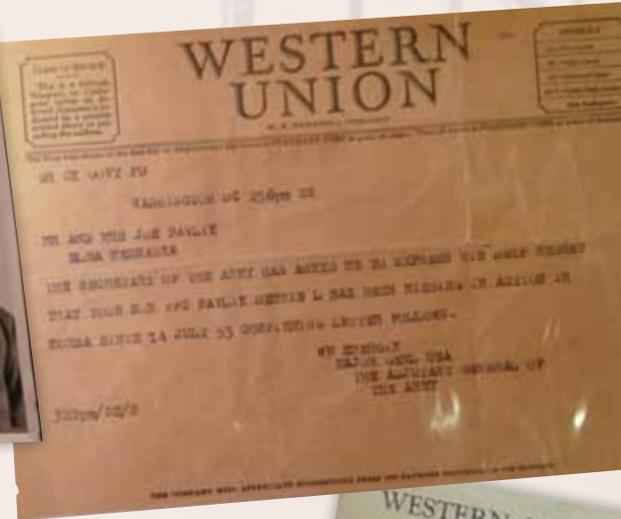
"Each day, when we came out of our bunker in the morning and looked over the valley, it looked like a heavy fog, from all the burned gun powder."

Dennis Pavlik | U.S. Army Veteran

It was a July night when a self-propelled 155 mm howitzer, drove through their position, headlights bright. "After they went through, it seemed that no incoming rounds landed out of our area. It came in very heavy and hard the rest of the night."

Soldiers passed by while they lay in their foxholes. "After talking with others later, we came to the idea that these latter troops were the Chinese. They walked right through us, and we did not even know it."

Pavlik received word in the middle of the night to leave his foxhole and meet at



Courtesy Photos

Dennis Pavlik's parents received news of his well-being via Western Union telegram. They received word of his release while they were in a movie theater. "Everyone cheered," his parents told him, when they announced the news to the theater in his small town of Elba, Neb.

▶ the mess tent nearby where the radio jeep sat. When he arrived, all he found was confusion. His sergeant had just returned from headquarters with the orders, "stay at all costs; form a new line."

After waiting for someone to give further orders, and failed attempts at fixing the radio, the mood changed. "We went into look-out-for-yourself mode. I really don't remember any direct order to abandon position."

As Pavlik headed up a mountain, he could hear the sound of Chinese bugles. "It seemed that three of them communicated, and you were in the middle of the triangle," he said. "You never did see them but they made some chills run up and down your back. I still can hear them." ▶

▶ He and eight others made it to the top of the mountain together. It was there they would surrender to the Chinese. After attempts to hold their ground, the Chinese approached the men, motioning for them to raise their arms and surrender. Pavlik was crouched behind a rock with his gun aimed and ready to fire, a few feet away from a Chinese soldier. He heard another American yell, "don't shoot, don't shoot," and he stood down.

He said he believes now if he had shot the Chinese soldier, all eight of them would have been killed immediately.

“It was at this time that we had given up our freedom. We no longer had any control of what we did, but had to do as we were told. It seems funny how that rifle and bayonet along with burp guns could speak such plain English.”

Dennis Pavlik | U.S. Army Veteran

Pavlik estimated about 25 U.S. Soldiers were killed and 40 were captured that day. He and the eight men joined other prisoners as they marched north toward the prison camp the Chinese called Camp Six. It also was referred to as Death Valley or the Mining Camp.

After arrival, they were clothed in pajama-like blue pants and tops and kept in a room big enough for seven. The rooms had dirt floors. Each man was given a mat and a blanket. The food they ate included rice, millet and dried fish heads. On occasion, they would get steamed bread that was heavy and moist and tasted good comparatively, he said.

Pavlik was interviewed once, for about two hours. He was asked questions about the structure of the American units and ▶

▶ also about who he was and what his family did back home. He said he was careful not to give them any information they didn't already have.

Pavlik spent approximately six weeks in the camp. It was Aug. 25, 1953, when he was a part of a prisoner exchange that would bring him home. As each name was called off the list, the man stepped forward and regained his freedom, no longer a prisoner of war. "It felt like a big weight had been lifted off your shoulders. That is about as good as I can explain it."

Through the years, Pavlik reconnected with fellow Soldiers in an attempt to piece together what happened. "It is like putting together pieces of a puzzle, and I can never find the last one," he said.

He has dedicated time telling his story to media, at schools and worked to have a memorial built for Nebraska POWs at Memorial Park in Omaha. The memorial was dedicated last September.

He believes the most important message he gives is about freedom.

"Freedom is something that touches you, but you cannot touch it," he said. "Do not take it for granted, as a lot of good men have died so that we may have our freedom." 📌

Dennis Pavlik flips through a photo album of news clippings about his experience as a POW. He says he believes in the importance of his message about freedom, and is proud of his collection. Pavlik received a Bronze Star and a Prisoner of War Medal for his service.



Photo by Kate O'Dell

HELLO

March 10 to April 6

Beth Burt-Miller, *Human Resources*

Michael Chaney, *Logistics*

Brian Crane, *Surgery*

Alan Fulton, *Mental Health*

John Gould, *Research*

Nancy Herman, *Human Resources*

William Jones, *Mental Health*

Nicole Melbardis, *Surgery*

Kiarra Morgan, *Surgery*

Jose Novoa, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Sandra Paasch, *Geriatrics and Extended Care*

Rebecca Raue, *Human Resources*

Theodore Seward, *Mental Health*

Katelyn Sokolik, *Primary Care*

John Stinehart,

Environmental Management Service

Christopher Tremblay, *Logistics*

Floyd Williams, *Logistics*

Mila Zinkoc, *Nursing*

Tara Zoucha, *Primary Care*

GOODBYE

Lu Bradley-Crothers, *Lab*

Bridget Coffey, *Mental Health*

Melanie Cramer, *Geriatrics and Extended Care*

Carla Dawson, *Business Office*

Christine Masat, *Business Office*

Jacqueline Mayeur, *Nurse Executive's Office*

Ghulam Mirza, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Virginia Pedersen, *Surgery*

Sarah Thompson-Krug,
Veterans Canteen Service

Darrel Willoughby, *Chief of Staff's Office*

Peter Woodbridge, *Quality Management;*
Veterans Engineering Resource Center

RETIRING

Judith Bell, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

June Gans, *Mental Health*

Bernard Greiner, *Mental Health*

Melinda Haag, *Veterans Canteen Service*

Cynthia Hall, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Steven McCoy, *Business Office*

Sharan Moore-Bryson, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Deborah Phillips, *Business Office*

Elizabeth Pruitt, *Chief of Staff's Office*

James Regan, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

CELEBRATING Asian American and Pacific Islander HERITAGE MONTH

May is recognized as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month to commemorate two notable events – the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.

The “Asian/Pacific American” designation encompasses more than 50 ethnic or language groups, including native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. More Asian and Pacific Islander groups are recognized than in the past, with 28 Asian and 19 Pacific Island subgroups representing a vast array of languages and cultures.

Within the Department of Veterans Affairs’ workforce, as of February 2013, 2.64 percent of men and 4.2 percent of women are of Asian heritage. A smaller percentage, .10 percent of men and .13 percent of women are native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders, according to the Office of Diversity Inclusion.

From the Civil War through today, Asian American and Pacific Islanders have fought for the United States. Single-race Asian Veterans number 265,200, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, with one in three of them being more than 65 years old. The number of native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander Veterans is 27,800, with one in five being more than 65 years of age. 📌



Courtesy Photo

The famed commandos of Merrill’s Marauders, a unit of Soldiers who slogged their way through the Burmese jungles to overcome the Japanese occupiers, consisted of a number of Japanese-American, or Nisei. They served in both intelligence and combat capacities during World War II, translating captured documents and fighting where needed. Grant Hirabayashi (second from left) was among these men, and he had to fend off not only the usual assortment of jungle-bred ailments such as dysentery and malaria, but also an allergy to the preservatives used in K-rations. Hirabayashi would later serve in India and China; in the late days of the war, he interrogated Japanese POWs, one of whom accused him of betraying his people. Learn more about Hirabayashi and other Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans at www.loc.gov/vets. (Source: Veterans History Project)

To be a part of the Asian, Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, contact Laura Neal, Equal Employment Opportunity officer at 402-995-3109 or laura.neal@va.gov.

VOLUNTEER RECEIVES AWARD FOR *Outstanding Contributions*

Kate O'De11 | Public Affairs

The Jerry Joyce Living Legacy Award recognizes those who dedicate their time to improving the community and helping others.

Terry Gillispie, a volunteer at the Lincoln Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, received the award this year for all of the hours he spent working for Veterans. Gillispie heads the Veterans Advisory Council, a committee comprised of Veterans and VA employees who help Veterans.

"We've been doing this for about three years now, and it's paying off. A lot of the younger Veterans are working for the VA. Those are the Veterans we are trying to get ahold of," he said. "Veterans by nature believe it is weakness to look for help; so they don't look for help. We open the doors and get them into the system."

Greg Joyce, Jerry's son, presented Gillispie with a check for \$2,500 and a trophy. The trophy now sits atop a desk VA employees constructed for Gillispie, as he didn't have a desk as a volunteer at the Lincoln facility. He donated the money to the Veterans Freedom Music Festival, which will be held in June at the Lincoln VA campus. The Veterans Freedom Music Festival began three years ago with the Veterans Advisory Council members going door-to-door collecting donations. Gillispie hopes to raise enough this year to start planning for next year's event. "We don't want to go into next year with no funds and start all over."



Courtesy Photo

Terry Gillispie receives a trophy and a check as the recipient of the 2013 Jerry Joyce Living Legacy Award during a March ceremony at the Legacy Estates Retirement Community in Lincoln, Neb.

"I don't do this for the recognition, but I was very honored."

Terry Gillispie | VA Volunteer

Gillispie said he is thankful for support he gets from the entire Veterans Advisory Council and said he was humbled to receive the award. 📍

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE **Veterans Advisory Group**

About two months ago, the Veterans Advisory Group in Omaha received a comment relating to the sleep clinic in one of its suggestion boxes at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

Patients spend all night at the clinic as outpatients, often not leaving until 9 a.m. the next morning. Could coffee and food be provided for them in the clinic? About two weeks after the suggestion was reviewed at the Veterans Advisory Group meeting, they arranged with Veterans Canteen Service to provide coffee and muffins to the sleep clinic. Patients love it, especially the coffee, said Laurie Tilson, a medical support assistant in the clinic.

COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED BY THE VETERANS ADVISORY GROUP:

- "I am pleased with my father's stay. Good staff, quiet environment at night. Thank you for giving him great care as a post-(operative) patient on your floor!"
- "Everyone we have dealt with has been exceptionally helpful and friendly, from people asking if we need help in the halls, to the doctors and nurses. Thank you!"
- "Thank you for the excellent care given my brother. Greatly Appreciated!"
- "Keep up the good work and give those phlebotomists a raise!"

While this is a sample of the compliments received by the Omaha Veterans Advisory Group, they also take suggestions and complaints. Veterans are encouraged to submit their compliments, comments or complaints to any of the suggestion boxes throughout the Omaha VA Medical Center. 📍

The Lincoln and Grand Island facilities also have Veteran groups. To find out more about these groups, call Rob McCrory in Lincoln at 402-486-7879 or Coral Selden at 308-395-3299 in Grand Island.

JOSEPH KRZYWICKI

Program Support Assistant, Palliative Care and Medical Foster Home | VA NWHCS, Omaha

Adapting to the needs of people served by programs their tax dollars fund and ensuring goals are met and exceeded to ensure service is rendered at the highest possible quality and speed.

To be patriotic means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country; and the most time we spend away from family in life is through work. So, I choose work that allows me to express my patriotism, specifically toward Veterans who already look out for our country; nothing could be more patriotic. If an American is proud of their heritage and considers life blessed, it is not only their opportunity to serve others less fortunate, it is a source of strong character for our nation that we work to provide for our own citizens.

INDRA MASTNY, RN

VA NWHCS, Lincoln

To return to my community what it is that they do for me, and to set an example for my children to follow— to develop into contributing members of society. It's a pure honor to serve to the men and women of the U.S. armed forces.

MICHELE O'CONNOR MPA

Patient-Centered Care Training Coordinator | VA NWHCS, Omaha

Using your strengths and talents to *be there* for others, regardless of what strengths and/or talents you have.

In order to ensure this is truly a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people,' we all must get involved in whatever ways we can. I remember first hearing this back in fifth grade when we studied civics, and it stuck.

PEGGY PAULEY, LPN

Triage Call Center | VA NWHCS, Omaha

What public service is to me is the backbone of all that you stand for, starting from a child to adult; it is flexibility, trust and loyalty to yourself and serving of others.

MARILYN PEREZ

Call Center/Switchboard Operator | VA NWHCS, Omaha

To me, public service means service for all, and to the best we can, to give all good service in any direction or need of that person.

DEBORAH ROLFSMEYER, LPN

Eye Clinic | VA NWHCS, Grand Island

To care for others, treat them with respect, thank them for their service and try to make America still the best place to call home. My heartfelt thanks to all Veterans and their families.

It is important to me to do this for our Veterans. After all, they have sacrificed their time with family and friends, suffered in terrible conditions due to war and many lives have been lost. Many who have returned still suffer the nightmares of war, need our care and our understanding to help them deal with their trauma and to go on and live a happy life.

I've just always liked working with people. That's why I work in a community nursing home. I've worked in geriatrics for 25 years, and I enjoy doing it. They have so much to give us.



Jane Cote, RN
Grand Island CBOC

I worked at a Veterans' home first and I liked it so much that I decided to come here. I love Veterans because they are totally unique. They are so relaxed, and because of the things they have seen they have stories to tell. I work with them often, and I get to hear daily from them why we are here.



April Dooley
Program Support Assistant
Ambulatory Care | Grand Island CBOC

Good benefits and good pay. I like the entire VA facility and the atmosphere here.



Steve Walls
Mail Clerk | Omaha VAMC

JASON SCHWARTE

Budget Analyst | VA NWHCS, Omaha

To serve the general public in the most sincere way by being nonunion and placing the mission first. It's the best way to give back to a country that once was and will be.

LYNN SKORNIK

Certified Pharmacy Technician | VA NWHCS, Grand Island

Working as a federal employee at the VA, it feels good to have the Veterans say thank you and to know we are giving them a service that is so important to them.

I believe it is important to be a contributing member of society whether it's volunteering or at a paid job. I like to be involved in volunteering because it makes me feel as if I am making a positive difference. I believe it is better to give than to receive, and I have tried to teach my children the same.



IT'S YOUR CALL

Confidential help for Veterans and their families



Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net

Visit Our Social Media Sites



Like Us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/NebraskalovaVA



Follow @VANWIHCS

Get news, information for patients and upcoming events



Aiming FOR perfection



Officers from Omaha's VA Police Service participated in a shooting range recently at the Southwest Iowa Law Enforcement Complex. Lt. Terry Kennedy and Officer David Smith, firearms instructors for the department, set up at the complex for the day as officers rotated in and out for training. According to Kennedy, the VA police officers each shoot at least 800 rounds of ammunition a year to keep proficient in their skills.

"Law enforcement is an ever-changing profession," said Mark Kula, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's Police chief. "To keep up with the changes, and to keep proficient with tactics seldom used, except during certain emergency situations, continuous training by police officers is a necessity. People's lives depend on it."

National Police Week is celebrated May 12 through 18. During Police Week, officers and members of the public honor fallen officers on May 15, Peace Officers Memorial Day.

VA Police are uniformed federal police officers with the authority to enforce all federal laws, VA rules and regulations. More than 2,800 officers and administrative police personnel operate at Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and National Cemetery Administration facilities across the country. Officers conduct and complete training continuously after attending an initial eight-week training course at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center at Fort Logan H. Roots in Little Rock, Ark.

EVENTS

what's going on?

- May 1** VA Food Pantry, Omaha
- May 2** National Day of Prayer
- May 5-11** Public Service Recognition Week
- May 6** VA Food Pantry, Lincoln
- May 6-10** National Hospital Week
- May 6-12** National Nurses Week
- May 10** Military Spouse Appreciation Day
Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Omaha
- May 10-11** Veterans of Armed Forces Outreach, Columbus, Neb.
- May 12** Mother's Day
- May 12-18** Women's Health Week
National Nursing Home Week
National Police Week
- May 13-17** National VA Research Week
- May 13** Understanding TBI and Family Relationships for Caregivers of Veterans, Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island
- May 14** Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Omaha
- May 15** VA 2K, Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island
VA Food Pantry, Omaha
Veterans Information Forum, Lincoln
- May 17-18** Veterans of Armed Forces Outreach, McCook, Neb.
- May 17** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
Veterans Outreach at Salute Our Military Community, Omaha
- May 18** Armed Forces Day
- May 22** VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln
- May 24** Fifth Annual Memorial Day Commemoration, Omaha
- May 24 Welcome Home Event, Grand Island
- May 27** Memorial Day (Federal Holiday)
- May 29-June 4** National Veterans Golden Age Games, Buffalo, N.Y.

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



My Health, My Care: 24/7 ^{Online} Access to VA

Access Health Resources
Track Your Health
Refill VA Prescriptions
Register Today!



VETERANS FREEDOM MUSIC FESTIVAL



Gates open from 8:30 am to 9 pm
Opening ceremony at 9 am | Top 9 Local Bands
The 43rd Army Band of the Nebraska National Guard

JUNE 15

2013

LINCOLN VA CAMPUS
600 South 70th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

NO ALCOHOL,
COOLERS OR PETS,
(SERVICE DOGS ONLY)
BRING LAWN CHAIRS
OR BLANKETS

INFORMATION FAIR: VA HEALTH CARE & VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

FREE
ADMISSION

VETERANS COLOR GUARD | FIRING PARTY
TAPS | FOOD VENDORS | FREE PARKING
KIDS ACTIVITIES FROM 11 AM TO 5 PM

Visit www.nebraska.va.gov for more information.



VA HEALTH CARE
Defining EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



VA HEALTH CARE

Defining EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

402-346-8800 | 1-800-451-5796

www.nebraska.va.gov