

# the link

MAY  
2015



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



MOTHER'S EXAMPLE  
SETS PATH FOR  
VA NURSE **5**

**One of the best aspects of my job leading this great team at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System is that I meet so many wonderful Veterans. Each of you has a unique story to tell that provides a glimpse into how you sacrificed, along with your family, to serve and defend this great nation.**



During my short time here, I was honored to attend a former prisoner of war recognition event, where I met several Veterans who suffered through captivity and unbearable events during war. Hearing their stories of heroism reinforces the importance of our mission at the VA health care system – “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.” – President Abraham Lincoln

To ensure VA continues to excel at this mission, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs launched an initiative called MyVA. This will reorient VA around Veterans’ needs and empower employees to assist them in delivering excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience. It is the largest department-wide transformation in VA’s history. It will focus on ideas shared by Veterans, employees, members of Congress and other stakeholders.

You will hear more about MyVA in coming months as our employees learn how to ensure we are delivering every Veteran seamless, integrated and responsive customer service, every time. The goal is to improve the Veteran experience, employee experience, and internal support services, establish a culture of continuous improvement, and enhance strategic partnerships. *Learn more about MyVA at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Don Burman".

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FACT: VA RESEARCHERS HAVE ACHIEVED MANY THINGS, TO INCLUDE THREE NOBEL PRIZES, SEVEN LASKER AWARDS AND NUMEROUS OTHER DISTINCTIONS, IN ADDITION TO THE FACT THAT MORE THAN 60 PERCENT OF VA RESEARCHERS ALSO PROVIDE DIRECT PATIENT CARE. [WWW.RESEARCH.VA.GOV](http://WWW.RESEARCH.VA.GOV)

Cover: Ellen Long, RN, nurse manager, Emergency Department, Omaha VA Medical Center, was named the best emergency room nurse in 2015 Omaha Magazine's Excellence in Nursing awards. Photo by Lori Bultman.

“As a Veteran, I enjoyed serving others and being a part of a team. Now that my military career has passed, I really enjoy being a part of the VA team and ensuring our Veterans are fully integrated into the VA system and receiving the benefits they have earned.”

Darin Krueger | Community Employment Coordinator  
Lincoln VA Clinic | U.S. Army Veteran



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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.

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## MEET

michelle  
holmes, LPN  
Shenandoah VA Clinic

# Star Award

## RECOGNIZES LOCAL IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**T**he Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23 Director's Network Star Award program is recognition intended to highlight strong practices at the facility level and serve as a means for broader application of these practices within the network. VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) was recently recognized with a Star Award for 2014 in the Facility Non-Clinical Process category for work to improve clinical documentation.

The Clinical Documentation Improvement (CDI) team at VA NWIHCS made improvements to processes by building a model and developing methods and procedures to ensure appropriate and detailed documentation. This led to increased productivity and clinical accuracy, according to their award submission.

"We are very proud of the success of our CDI program at NWI," said team member Nicole Keil, RN, BSN. The VA NWIHCS CDI team includes, Keil; Alex Kohls, RN, BSN; Kelly Gaudineer, RN and Tiffany Tesoro, RN, MSN.

CDI team members share the responsibility of overseeing clinical documentation processes for all inpatients, including those in the Intensive Care Unit. These team members are highly involved in the day-to-day processes of the inpatient teams and are available to provide training and guidance to other staff members when necessary. "Our team collaborates with the physicians and nurses to ensure the Veterans' chart reflects the care and treatment they receive," Keil said.

The CDI team began spreading their knowledge and practices within the inpatient areas of the Omaha VA Medical Center over a year ago, and then to sites across the nation, Kohls said. The team also mentors CDI programs at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VAMC, Richmond, Va., and Charles George VAMC, Asheville, N.C. "Our VA was the third nationally to institute a CDI program, and the VA NWIHCS CDI team has built this program from the ground up, with help from their mentor program at the Aleda Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Mich.," Kohls said. The VA NWIHCS CDI team is the only one in VISN 23.

"I am proud and honored to call the CDI team members a valued part of the Quality Management department," said Linda Muell, RN, quality manager, VA NWIHCS. "The goals of this program are to accurately capture the severity of illness and the true picture of the Veteran's illness, which will result in improved communication between providers," she said. "The program also helps to provide the foundational information to reduce overall mortality, increase the severity of illness scores and to capture the appropriate Veteran Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) funds." 

**How long have you worked at the VA?**  
"5 years."

**What does your job entail?**  
"Taking care of the Veterans in primary care."

**What do you like best about your job?**

"I just like the relationships we build with the Veterans here. I learn just as much from them as they do from me. I enjoy serving those who served us."

**When not at work, where can you be found?**

"When not at work, I can be found outside walking or with family."



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# MOTHER'S EXAMPLE SETS PATH FOR VA NURSE'S *'Excellence in Nursing' Recognition*

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

**Ellen Long used to visit the Omaha VA Medical Center (VAMC) when she was a young girl scout. She was captivated by the compassion nurses provided for their patients. One nurse in particular inspired Long to pursue a nursing career – her mother, who was a nurse at the Omaha VAMC for 42 years.**

Today, Long is not only the new nurse manager in the Emergency Department, she was named the best emergency room nurse in Omaha Magazine's inaugural Excellence in Nursing awards. The magazine's editors "received more than 150 nominations from patients, physicians and professionals," according to the publisher.

Long is a registered nurse who has worked in the emergency room for 10 years. She said it is her love of taking care of people that's motivating; serving Veterans adds to the satisfaction Long feels as a nurse.

"The culture at the VA is unique," Long said. "Our Veterans show a great appreciation for the care we provide. I also enjoy listening to their military stories."

Below: Ellen Long, RN, VA NWIHCS, talks to emergency room patient Tommy Buchanan.



Photo by Lori Bultman

Working in the ER is dynamic, Long said. "It is the only uncontrolled environment in the hospital. We can go from zero to multiple patients in minutes. ER nurses must be well-versed in many areas, to include orthopedics, ear, nose and throat, and gastroenterology. We have to know the whole body system because we have to be ready to treat anyone who walks through our doors."

Having the ability to perform at a high level and leading a team of nurses are critical traits for an ER nurse manager. The Emergency Department director said Long possesses both.

"Ellen is at the very top of her profession," said Dr. Scott Menolascino. "She is an authentic person who knows who she is. Yet, she doesn't have an idle comment. She will tell you the way it is and what she can do about it," Menolascino said. "I have a high respect for her."

Long is dedicated to patient care as well as the profession of nursing, said Eileen Kingston, RN, MPA, Nurse Executive/ Associate Director for Patient Care.

**“Our Veterans show a great appreciation for the care we provide. I also enjoy listening to their military stories.”**

Ellen Long, RN, MPA, Nurse Manager  
VA NWIHCS Emergency Department

"Her leadership and clinical contributions have made a sustainable impact in critical care in the emergency room," Kingston said. "We are extremely proud and honored to have her as part of our VA family." 📌

# Support available FOR VETERANS' CAREGIVERS

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**VA** offers a number of services that can provide Veteran's caregivers the support they need. Whether the caregiver, or the Veteran being cared for, could use help at home or just needs someone to listen, VA caregiver support is available.

Caregivers can be anyone, said Joni Morin, LCSW, caregiver support coordinator, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS). There are wives, husbands, sisters and mothers caring for Veterans, she said.

Most caregivers say they are doing what they love by taking care of their loved one, but Morin encourages them to take a break and take care of themselves. "Family members care for patients with not only physical, but also emotional situations, and those caregivers tend to put themselves on the back burner taking care of the loved one," Morin said.

## CAREGIVER SUPPORT LINE

**1-855-260-3274**

VA's Caregiver Support Line is just a quick phone call away – while you're supporting a Veteran,



VA is there to support you.

VA's Caregiver Support Line is toll-free and has licensed caring professionals standing by.

VA programs can help caregivers get what they, and the Veterans, need. VA offers various support programs to caregivers to include individual, group, telephone and online support, and peer mentoring programs.

Being the caregiver to a Veteran can be especially challenging for families with children, Morin said. "Caregivers for Veterans with young children have extra challenges," she

said. Respite care through the VA is only available for the Veteran, not for children, so it may be hard for younger caregivers to have time alone.

Morin said all caregivers should look for resources in their community. Churches, family and other support networks can be helpful; it is good to keep a list of things that need to be done around the house. "A caregiver can have the list available to family and friends so when someone can help, they know what is

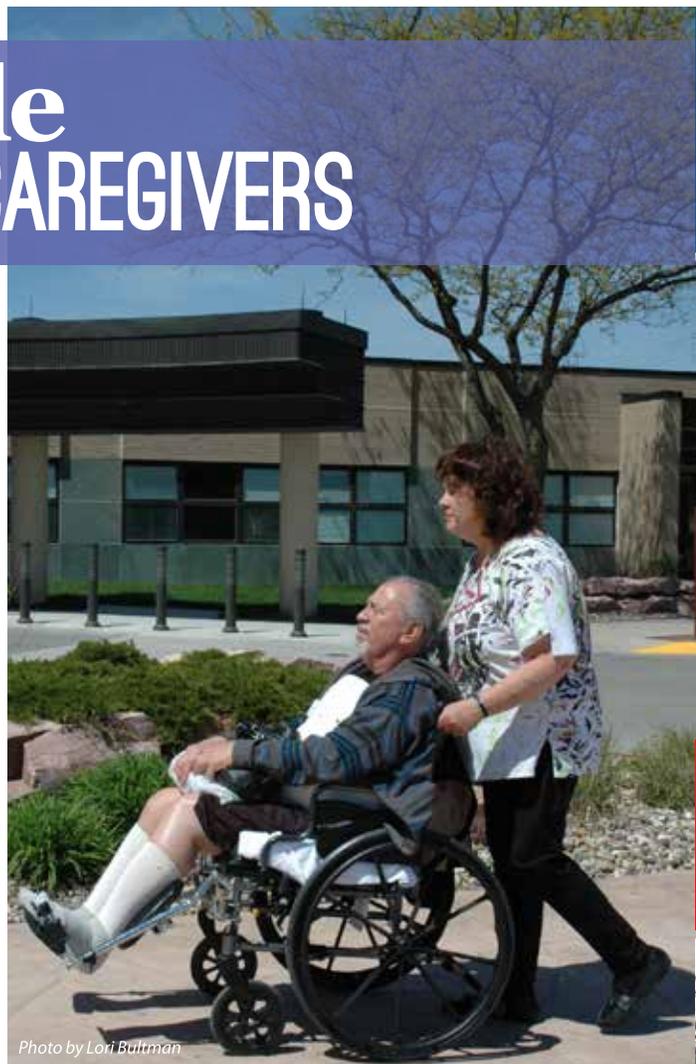


Photo by Lori Bultman

“Family members care for patients with not only physical, but also emotional situations, and those caregivers tend to put themselves on the back burner taking care of the loved one.”

Joni Morin, LCSW | Caregiver Support Coordinator

Above: Caregiver Debra McEwan cares for her husband, former U.S. Marine Joseph McEwan, while at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

needed,” Morin said. “Something as simple as cleaning the refrigerator can be a big help to an overwhelmed caregiver.”

VA NWIHCS currently supports 340 general caregivers and 90 in the Program for Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. It offers a wide range of services to caregivers of eligible Veterans of all service (continued on page 14) ▶

# Local Veteran prepares for National Veterans Golden Age Games

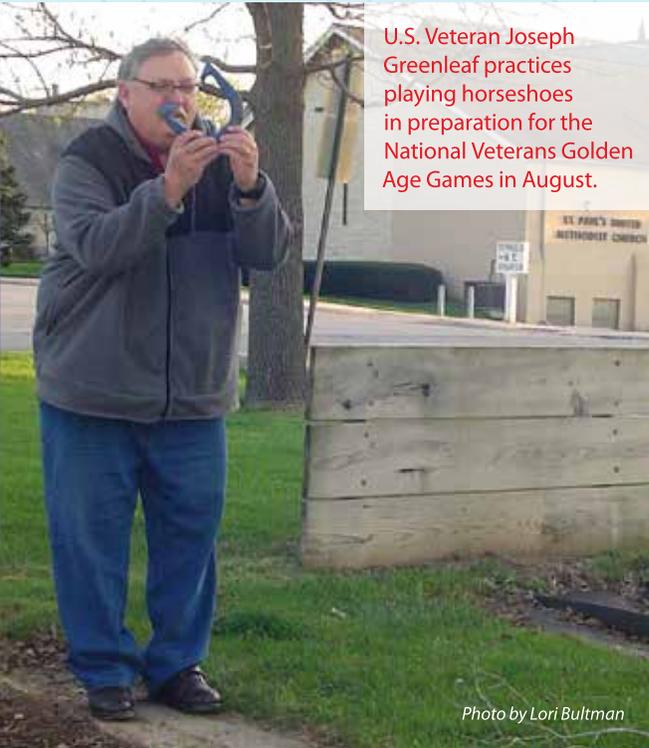
Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**While VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) employees and volunteers prepare to host the 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games in August, local Veterans are also preparing to compete at the games.**

The National Veterans Golden Age Games is the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States, and the only national multi-event sports and recreational seniors' competition program designed to improve the quality of life for all older Veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. The VA challenges and encourages senior Veterans to be proactive and embrace a healthier lifestyle.

**“I bought a tournament set of horseshoes and built pits in my yard.”**

Joseph Greenleaf, U.S. Coast Guard Veteran



U.S. Veteran Joseph Greenleaf practices playing horseshoes in preparation for the National Veterans Golden Age Games in August.

Photo by Lori Bultman

“I bought a tournament set of horseshoes and built pits in my yard,” Greenleaf said. He practices horseshoes there and at the local American Legion post. His preparation for the games also included rejoining the ‘Y’ to swim and work out, but he won’t stop there. Greenleaf is going to buy an air rifle and construct a range at his house, he said. *(continued on page 15)* ▶

Joseph Greenleaf of Papillion, Neb., saw the notice for the games at the Omaha VA Medical Center and decided to register for five events.

Greenleaf, a Veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, is a former radioman who worked on an arctic icebreaker, was a port security man, and later was commissioned to the rank of second lieutenant as an administrative officer. His former military experience shows in his effort to train for the Games.



## 29<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Golden Age Games

**Volunteer to support more than 800 Veterans from across the country as they come to Omaha Aug. 8-12 to compete in the 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games.**



**Sign up to Volunteer or Register to Compete in the Games at [www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov](http://www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov)**



# VA Researchers: Trailblazers in Innovation, Discovery

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

## **D**epartment of Veterans Affairs (VA) Research is turning 90. To celebrate, research week activities are planned at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

The goal of the VA research program is to meaningfully improve Veterans' health and advance health care, not only for Veterans, but for all Americans, according to Dr. Timothy J. O'Leary, VA chief research and development officer. VA research advances have been numerous, from effective therapies for tuberculosis to implantable cardiac pacemakers, from the first successful liver transplant to the development of the nicotine patch and beyond.

Approximately 52 researchers have 138 ongoing research projects at VA NWIHCS. Besides researchers, Veterans are also involved in research projects being conducted in

the VA NWIHCS clinical research unit, to include clinical trials for diabetes, vascular disorders, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and gout, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Experimental research is also being conducted at VA on wound healing, pulmonary disorders, alcohol-related diseases, endocrinology, arthritis, osteoporosis and cancer.

Research week at VA NWIHCS will be May 18 to 22. Several events are scheduled to honor researchers and the Veterans who participate in their studies. A 90 Years of VA Research program will be held May 19, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., in the Education Conference Room at the Omaha VAMC. At this event, researchers will present information about current research, to include: Vijay Shivaswamy, MBBS, MS, "Diabetes Research in the VA;" Sara A. Myers, Ph.D., "Improving Functional Outcomes in Veterans with Peripheral Arterial Disease;" and Dr. Ted Mikuls, "Rheumatoid Arthritis: Lessons Learned from U.S. Veterans." Fred Hamel, Ph.D., Acting Associate Chief of Staff for Research, will provide an overview of research conducted locally and will field questions from the audience. Research posters will be displayed in the main lobby of the Omaha VAMC May 20, 9 to 11 a.m. Researchers will be available to answer questions from employees and Veterans. All VA staff members are invited to attend these two events.

A state-of-the-art lecture on "Rheumatoid Arthritis: Lessons Learned from U.S. Veterans" will be provided by Dr. Ted R. Mikuls, M.S.P.H., a local VA-funded clinician scientist, May 22, 8:30 a.m., in the Omaha VAMC Education Conference Room. The lecture will be held for research scientists, residents and medical providers. Following the lecture, the annual Friends of Omaha VA Research Award will be presented to Mary Ward, long-time VA research employee and supporter.

Researchers with VA have achieved many things, to include three Nobel prizes, seven Lasker awards and numerous other distinctions, in addition to the fact that more than 60 percent of VA researchers also provide direct patient care. An integral part of VA research also includes those Veterans from all over the country who participate in VA research studies to help improve the lives of other Veterans. Local VA research achievements also depend on collaborations and partnerships with academic affiliates, University of Nebraska Medical Center and Creighton University School of Medicine, industry partners, nonprofit organizations, and Veteran service organizations. 

To learn more about VA Research, go to [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov).

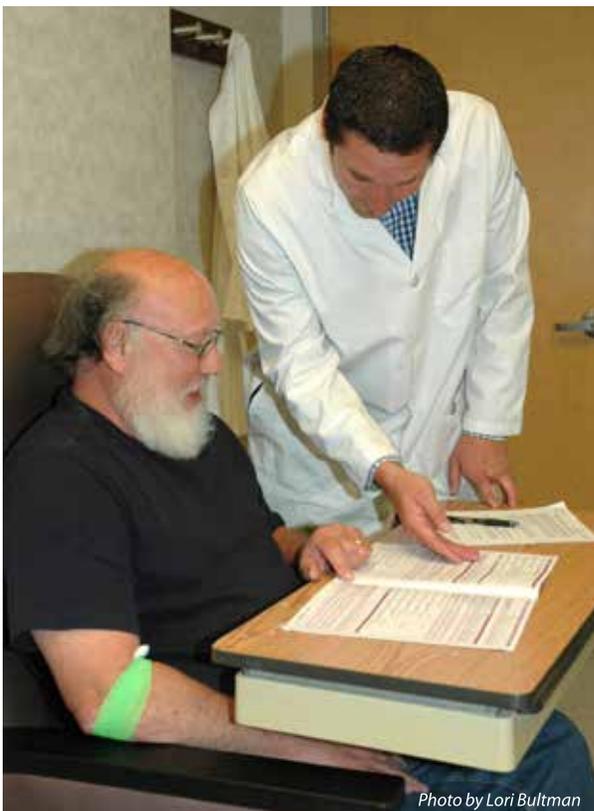


Photo by Lori Bultman

Left: Veteran William Proskocil talks to Jeff Newcomb, research coordinator, VA NWIHCS, about his participation in a four-year pre-diabetes research study.

# no more lines:

## ADDITION OF KIOSKS SHORTENS WAIT TIMES, IMPROVES VETERANS' EXPERIENCE

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**Improving the Veterans' experience at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) is a priority. Shortening lines and wait times was the goal last October when Veterans Point of Service (VPS) kiosks were installed.**

When patients arrive for an appointment at a VA NWIHCS facility, it is no longer necessary to go to the clinic counter to check in. Patients can check in at any one of 54 VPS kiosks.

"Our kiosks currently allow patients to check-in, update their demographics and submit for their travel pay," said Lina Demers, program specialist, Business Office. "In the future, patients will be allowed to request copies of records, scan in their new insurance cards and many more fun things."

To use the kiosk, Veterans can scan their Veterans Identification Card, or they can begin by answering a few questions. Once a Veteran has checked in, the kiosk will print out appointment times and locations for that day.

The kiosk also helps Veterans ensure their emergency contact and next of kin are updated, said Eric Spence, program analyst, Business Office. It streamlines check-in. If a patient needs special attention, a clerk is still available to assist, he said.

It seems VA NWIHCS Veterans like the new kiosks, Spence said. Since being installed, kiosk usage rates have steadily increased. "There were 7,800 kiosk interactions in October 2014, and 27,800 in March 2015."

The biggest time savings for Veterans using the kiosks has been with beneficiary travel. "Veterans are no longer required to submit for their travel pay at the Eligibility – Travel Desk," Spence said, "Veterans can submit their beneficiary travel at any kiosk within VA NWIHCS. Travel vouchers submitted at the kiosks go directly to the travel clerks for faster processing," he added.

“Our kiosks currently allow patients to check-in, update their demographics and submit for their travel pay.”

Lina Demers, program specialist, Business Office, VA NWIHCS

All kiosks have a built-in privacy screen that blocks the view from either side of the screen, Spence said. While the information on the kiosks is visible to the Veteran standing directly in front of the kiosk, the view should be obstructed for anyone standing in line behind the Veteran. The screens can be repositioned for additional privacy or ease of use. Additionally, the medical center's privacy officer, Karyn Stodden, has inspected the kiosks for privacy concerns.

In addition to improving the Veterans' experience at VA NWIHCS, the new kiosks help VA staff members. Besides decreasing lines at check-in, Spence said the kiosks' program notifies the clerk, nurse and provider when a patient is ready to be seen – no more passing charts back and forth in the clinic. Staff members also like that the program provides customized reporting for each provider, allowing them to see only when their patients are ready, he said. This can assist in decreasing the time Veterans spend in the waiting room. 📌

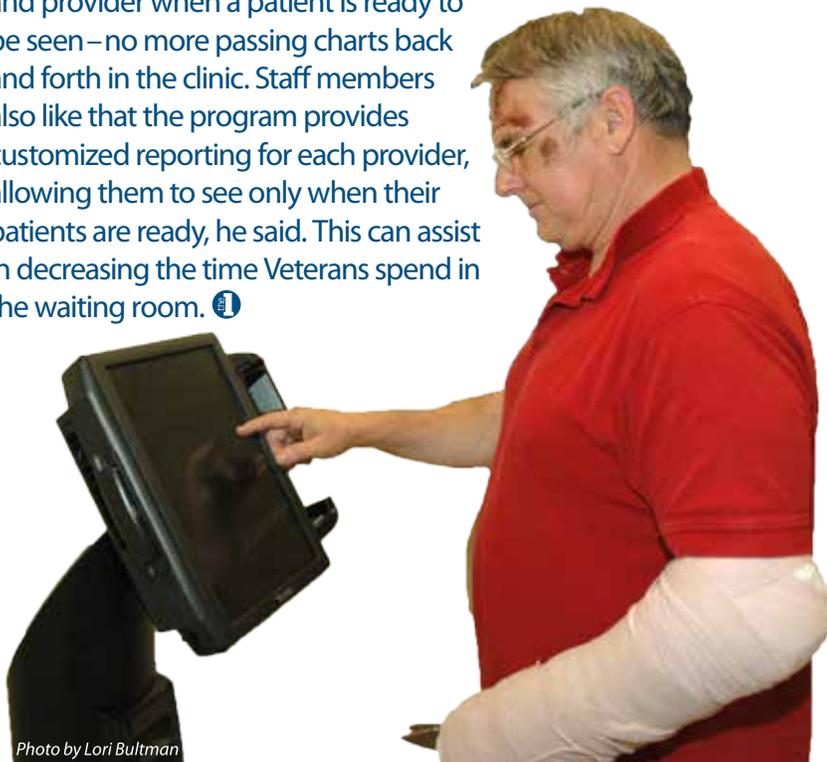


Photo by Lori Bultman

Right: Veteran Clarence Seale uses the express check-in kiosk at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

# VA Recognizes Volunteers' Dedication

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**D**uring April, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) recognizes volunteers who dedicate their time to Veterans. The Omaha VA Medical Center recognized its volunteers Apr. 16; the Grand Island VA Medical Center recognized its volunteers April 21. Lincoln VA Clinic volunteers were recognized April 30.

Volunteers play an important part in Veterans care. "As VA works to expand access to care for Veteran patients, volunteers continue to be involved," said Don Burman, director, VA NWIHCS. "Volunteers assist Veteran patients



by supplementing staff in settings including hospital wards, community living centers, outpatient clinics, DAV Transportation Network, courtesy

shuttle service, red coat greeters, end-of-life care programs, respite care programs, adaptive sports, creative arts, the list goes on and on."

Volunteers recognized at Omaha represented more than 216,000 all-time hours of service. During fiscal year 2014, some 55,000 hours were realized. This was the equivalent of \$1.3 million in labor contributions for the



Photos by Lori Bultman



Above: Denise Harrison, associate director for operations, VA NWIHCS, presents an award for 7,500 hours of service to VA volunteer Jessica Anderson.

year, said Christopher Shipp, chief, voluntary service, VA NWIHCS. In Grand Island, VA volunteers donated over 15,000 hours to assist Veterans. At the Lincoln VA Clinic, volunteers worked 18,000 hours of service in fiscal year (FY) 2014. The total VA NWIHCS labor contribution was about \$2.2 million for FY 2014.

Numbers aside, it is impossible to calculate the amount of caring and sharing volunteers provide to Veteran patients, Burman said. "Volunteers at the VA are a priceless asset to the nation's Veterans and to the Department of Veterans Affairs." 

“Volunteers at the VA are a priceless asset to the nation's Veterans and to the Department of Veterans Affairs.”

Don Burman, Director, VA NWIHCS

Top Left: Patricia Coenen, Frank Compton, Sally Compton, James Lattimer and Ed Williamson were some of the volunteers recognized at the annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon in Omaha. They each donated 750 hours of service to Veterans.

Left: Louis Warren, Kenny Davis, and Richard Harrington were recognized for 1,750 hours of volunteer service at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

## VA to host Memorial Day Commemoration

# Honoring America's Fallen Servicemembers

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

Millions of Americans have served in the U.S. military. Since 1775, more than 657,800 have paid the ultimate sacrifice.



Photo by Anna Morelock

Honoring the memory of these fallen is a solemn responsibility that falls on the shoulders of every American so the fallen servicemembers' lives are not forgotten.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System extends an open invitation for all to join in the 7th Annual Memorial Day Commemoration at the Omaha VA Medical

Center main flag pole area at 4 p.m. May 22. The event will include a guest speaker from the U.S. military, color guard, formal Retreat ceremony performed by the VA NWIHCS Police Ceremonial Honor Guard and music by the U.S. Air Force Heartland of America Band Brass Ensemble. 

## IN FLANDERS FIELD

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

By John McCrae

**PARTICIPATE:** Veteran service organizations are invited to participate by bringing a memorial wreath and placing it at the battle cross memorial during the ceremony. Contact Will Ackerman, Public Affairs Officer, if you would like to place a wreath, at [William.ackerman@va.gov](mailto:William.ackerman@va.gov) or call 402-995-4719.

# VA to Use Driving Distance for CHOICE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

**To expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced April 24 that it will determine eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program based on the distance between a Veteran's place of residence and the nearest VA medical facility using driving distance rather than straight-line distance. This change has been published in the Federal Register and is effective immediately.**

"VA is pleased to announce the distance calculation change from straight-line to driving distance for the Veterans Choice Program," said Secretary Robert McDonald. "This update to the program will allow more Veterans to access care when and where they want it. We look forward to continued dialogue with Veterans and our partners to help us ensure continued improvements for Veterans to access care."

The change from straight-line to driving distance roughly doubles the number of eligible Veterans. Letters are being sent to the

VHA Communications

newly eligible Veterans to let them know they are now eligible for the Veterans Choice Program under this expansion. If a Veteran does not remember receiving a Veterans Choice Card or has other questions about the Choice Program, they can call 866-606-8198.

Effective immediately, VA is also changing the mileage calculation for beneficiary travel. The change will ensure consistency in VA's mileage calculations across the two programs. The beneficiary travel calculation will now be made using the fastest route instead of the shortest route. 

For more details about the department's progress and related information, see [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/factsheets\\_and\\_details.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/factsheets_and_details.asp)

# North Platte Canteen Volunteer Shares Stories

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

**Rosalie Lippincott was a teen when she volunteered at the North Platte, Neb. Canteen in 1941. The experience touched her so much that at 87 she is still sharing stories about the time she spent there.** On April 27, an audience of Veterans, employees and community members welcomed Lippincott to the Lincoln VA Clinic where she shared her experiences and talked about the history of the canteen.



“I was doing for someone’s loved one what I was hoping someone was doing for my loved one.”

Rosalie Lippincott,  
North Platte Canteen Volunteer

“The North Platte Canteen is something every Nebraskan should be proud of,” Lippincott said to the audience. Some attendees were able to visit with her in person while others watched and listened from afar through video teleconferencing.

The idea of the canteen came from a woman who thought her brother was going to stop in North Platte on his way to the war, Lippincott said. The woman gathered treats and goodies to give to her brother when his train stopped for loading coal. As it turned

out, the train that arrived on the day specified was full of Kansas National Guard Soldiers, not her brother’s unit. So she gave the treats to them. The



Above: North Platte Canteen volunteers welcome troop trains.

Bottom Left: The North Platte Canteen averaged 18 trains a day for 51 months, serving troops food and drinks and providing entertainment.

reaction of the troops was so astounding that soon, thanks to the generosity of surrounding communities, the idea became reality for all troop trains stopping in North Platte. “America had become a beehive of activity after the events of Pearl Harbor as everyone stepped up to contribute to the war effort,” Lippincott said.

The canteen operated every day from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., for 51 months. Lippincott said on the occasions when she volunteered, her day didn’t start there. It started the day before when she traveled from her home to a friend’s house in Shelton, Neb., where they caught the train to North Platte at 3:30 a.m. They would arrive at the canteen at 7 a.m. and would catch the 11 p.m. train back to Shelton, she said.

(continued on page 15) ▶

# Blueprint for Excellence sets goals for VHA's future

VHA Communications



**W**ith the enactment of the **Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014**, requirements were introduced for the most significant structural changes to Veterans' health care since VA became a Cabinet-level Department in 1989.

In response, the Veterans Health Administration introduced its Blueprint for Excellence in September 2014. The Blueprint contains 10 essential strategies, which address improving the performance of VHA health care now, developing a positive service culture, transitioning from "sick care" to "health care," and developing agile business systems and management processes that are efficient, transparent and accountable.

## THEME 1: Improve Performance

The first essential strategy is to improve performance. To do this, VA must operate a health care network that anticipates and meets the unique needs of enrolled Veterans, in general, and the service-disabled and most-vulnerable Veterans, in particular.

Highly service-disabled Veterans fare better with a system dedicated to coherently meeting their care needs. Without substantial coordination, most private sector health care providers are not

equipped to meet the special needs of spinal-cord injured Veterans, those with sensory loss, Veterans with poly-trauma, and Veterans with serious mental illness (almost always with significant, chronic physical illness), let alone coordinate services between inpatient, outpatient, rehabilitative and home-care environments. The VHA delivery system must, therefore, excel in specialty expertise related to Veterans' unique military occupational health exposures and must be adept in treating Veterans' broader health needs.

According to the Blueprint, high-risk patients, especially those who also have mental health or social challenges, will receive higher levels of contact (which may include more telephone calls or care of chronic conditions at home through the use of medical monitoring devices). Enhanced coordination may also include expanded social work and links to community resources.

Additionally, the Blueprint requires VA to deliver high-quality, Veteran-centered care that compares favorably to the best of private sector in measured outcomes, value, access and patient experience.

The VA's "Triple Aim" – better health, care and value – offers a laudable system goal for VA while also inspiring optimal health and well-being as the goal for all Veterans who entrusts VA with their lives.

The Blueprint for Excellence continually reinforces the idea that Veterans deserve a health system which operates at its highest potential effectiveness, and, as individuals, the opportunity to experience the best possible outcomes of care. 📄

Take a look into VHA's future by reviewing the Blueprint for Excellence at: (by following the link on the VA NWIHC's homepage.) [http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/docs/VHA\\_Blueprint\\_for\\_Excellence.pdf](http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/docs/VHA_Blueprint_for_Excellence.pdf)

HONORING SERVICE  
EMPOWERING  
HEALTH

## HELLO

**THOMAS ANDERSON**, *Nursing*  
**JASON CARSON**, *Engineering*  
**NANCI CLARK**, *Surgery*  
**PAUL FERRIN**, *Engineering*  
**OSCAR HANSEN**,  
*Environmental Management Service*  
**THOMAS HARRIS**,  
*Environmental Management Service*  
**LORETTA HILGENKAMP**, *Nursing*  
**SUSSY KING**,  
*Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*  
**JILL LOGSTON**, *Human Resources*  
**GREGORY PETERS**, *Imaging*  
**ISRAEL POMMELLS**,  
*Veterans Canteen Service*  
**RICHARD RILEY**,  
*Environmental Management Service*  
**ROBERT SCHERMERHORN**, *Nursing*  
**ERIC SLUITER**, *Surgery*  
**CAROLINE SPENCER**,  
*Veterans Canteen Service*  
**ROSALYN WOODS**,  
*Veterans Canteen Service*

## GOODBYE

**JOHN ALBERS**, *Engineering*  
**HEIDI BELLAR**, *Nursing*  
**PATRICIA BOWDEN**, *Nursing*  
**EILEEN BROICH**, *Nursing*  
**DENNIS CHAKKALAKAL**, *Research*  
**NANCI LEA CLARK**, *FEE*  
**WILLIAM DOBSON**, *Nursing*  
**ROBERT FORSE**, *Surgery*  
**BRUCE GULLIKSON**,  
*Information Technology*

**MEGAN HEERMAN-STEEVE**,  
*Nursing*  
**JENNIFER JENSEN**, *Human Resources*  
**TYLER KAPPLE**, *Prosthetics*  
**PEGGY LIVINGSTON**, *Nursing*  
**ALBERT LOPEZ**, *VA Police*  
**EYAL MARGALIT**, *Surgery*  
**STEPHANIE MASSING**,  
*Veterans Canteen Service*  
**YAMIRETH MEHLER**, *Laboratory*  
**ALEXANDER MISIUNAS**,  
*Surgical Processing Services*  
**AMY NELSON**, *Human Resources*  
**TRAVIS PEPER**, *Business Office*  
**SUDHA RAVILLA**,  
*Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*  
**KIMBERLY REDD**,  
*Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*  
**JEREMY ROBERT**,  
*Information Technology*  
**ERIC EUGENE SLUITER**, *FEE*  
**GARY STUCKENSCHMIDT**,  
*Engineering*

## RETIRING

**SHARONANN BENDER**,  
*Business Office*  
**WANDA DAVIS**, *Nursing*  
**DENNIS HAWKES**,  
*Environmental Management Service*  
**DATY KEYS**, *Human Resources*  
**KITTY PETERSON**,  
*Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*  
**BRUCE WAGNER**,  
*Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*  
**RICHARD WEISBROOK**,  
*Environmental Management Service*

## events

# WHAT'S GOING ON?

- May 5** *National Nurses Day*  
*Salsa Bar benefit for the National Veterans Golden Age Games, Lincoln VA Clinic*  
*Cinco de Mayo*
- May 6** *Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha*
- May 10** *Mother's Day*
- May 12** *3rd Annual Crusin' Lincoln Show and Shine, Lincoln VA Clinic*
- May 15** *VA Coffeehaus, Lincoln VA Clinic*
- May 16** *Armed Forces Day*
- May 18-22** *VA Research Week*
- May 20** *VA2K, Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island*  
*Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha*
- May 22** *Memorial Day Commemoration, Omaha VAMC*
- May 25** *Memorial Day (Observed)*
- May 27** *VA Community Book Club, Lincoln VA Clinic*
- May 30** *VA Patriots on the Plains Poker Run, Grand Island*  
*Memorial Day (Traditional)*

For more information about VA NWIHCS events, visit [www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov).



► *Support Available for Veterans' Caregivers continued from page 6*

eras to include: skilled nursing, home-based primary care, a home health aide, home or vehicle modifications, medical equipment, aid and attendance and respite care.

The Program for Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers was established for Veterans who suffered or aggravated a substantial injury on active duty after Sept. 11, 2001. This program provides additional services or benefits to eligible caregivers. "This program may provide a monthly stipend, health care coverage for the caregivers without insurance, mental health services and possibly travel benefits to attend the Veteran's medical appointments," Morin said. 

Veterans or caregivers who would like more information about VA caregiver programs can contact Morin at 402-995-4618, or the VA caregiver support line at 1-855-260-3274. Morin is also available to assist with determining what a Veteran's and caregiver's needs are and what services may benefit them. Veterans who meet the criteria for the post 9/11 Program for Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers may begin the application process on their own by accessing the Caregiver Program application (VA Form 10-10CG) at [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov), or contact Morin for assistance.

► *Preparing for the Games continued from page 7*

Even the dominoes competition at the Golden Age Games will be fierce, so Greenleaf said he plays dominoes “live,” and on the computer when he doesn’t have an available competitor. He registered to compete in nine-ball as well.

His advice to other registered participants is to watch videos of previous Golden Age Games and to get a copy of all the rules at [www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov](http://www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov). Greenleaf also said to practice. 📌

► *North Platte Canteen Volunteer continued from page 12*

While at the canteen, Lippincott said she sorted books and magazines, peeled boiled eggs, washed dishes and made sandwiches. She said her boyfriend at the time was away at the war. Working at the canteen made her feel she was doing something to help in the war effort. “I was doing for someone’s loved one what I was hoping someone was doing for my loved one.” She eventually married that boyfriend. They were married for 62 years.

Many troops were touched by the canteen during its operations; an average of 18 trains stopped each day, Lippincott said. The canteen also helped volunteers feel they were doing their part for the war. “It was a wonderful patriotic activity to do for those who were serving.” She said they were exhausted at the end of every day they worked, but added; “We were tired, but it was a good tired.”

The North Platte Canteen has been gone for many years. The building it was housed in no longer stands, however the troops who stopped there for a very few minutes on their patriotic journey have not been forgotten by Lippincott. “I sometimes wonder what happened to those men,” she said. The canteen building may be gone, but as long as the memories remain with men and women like those listening to her stories, she said, the North Platte Canteen will live on. 📌



May 3-9

## WHY DID YOU CHOOSE PUBLIC SERVICE?

*I've always had a passion for assisting others who are in need. Therefore, I felt what better way for me to utilize my time and talent than to provide services to those individuals who have shouldered the responsibility of making it possible for me and my fellow Americans to enjoy the freedom and many other privileges.*



**Daniel Coats** | Social Worker  
Holdrege VA Clinic | U.S. Army Veteran

*I chose to enter public service after talking with my parents about their experience as social workers. They both had careers within the VA, and I liked the idea of having the opportunity to help others, particularly serving those who have served. Everyone is familiar with facing challenges and adversity that we may not be ready for, or be fully equipped to handle. It brings me joy to be able to identify obstacles to success and then assist people with smashing through those obstacles.*



**Kevin Daly** | PACT Social Worker  
Grand Island VA Medical Center

*I chose to become a social worker after my family received assistance through the social services field with my mentally handicapped brother. I completed my internship at the VA Illiana Health Care System in Danville, Ill., as part of my master's degree requirements. I enjoyed the experience so much that I became a full time employee. I have been with the VA for 16 years and hope to be able to continue to provide needed services, education and information to our Veterans and their families. It has truly been a very rewarding experience.*



**Denise K. Cottingham, LCSW**  
PACT Social Worker | North Platte VA Clinic

*It gives me pleasure to be able to help others. I enjoy knowing that my work every day is going toward a mission of helping to improve someone's life.*



**Heather Bojanski** | OEF/OIF/OND Program Manager  
Omaha VAMC



# VETERANS FREEDOM MUSIC FESTIVAL

## Top 5 Local Bands

GATES OPEN-10 AM  
OPENING CEREMONY-10:30 AM | CLOSING CEREMONY-5:45 PM

# JUNE 20 2015



LINCOLN VA CAMPUS  
600 South 70<sup>th</sup> Street  
Lincoln, Nebraska

## WELCOME HOME EVENT:

VA Health Care & Veterans Organizations

Kids Activities-Noon to 4 PM | Free Parking & Admission | Food

9,000 Can Eagle Construction Sculpture

provided by the Nebraska Pork Producers Be Inspired

Bring Lawn Chairs, Blankets, Coolers (Subject to inspection) No Alcohol or Pets (Service Animals Only)

The appearance of event sponsors and/or contributors and their logos does not constitute endorsement by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

Visit [www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov) for more information.



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