

# the link

DECEMBER 2015  
VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN  
IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

6

VETERAN SERVICE  
ORGANIZATIONS  
SPREAD CHEER  
DURING HOLIDAYS





# Happy Holidays to All

**B. DON BURMAN** Director, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

**As we enter the holiday season and the end of the year, many of our employees will take much-needed time off and enjoy the company of their family and friends.** It's an opportunity to slow down and count the blessings that have been bestowed upon us throughout this past year. I encourage you to take full advantage of the holidays, take a breather from the fast pace of this past year, and rejuvenate yourself.

Although most of us will have the blessing to spend time with family and friends and enjoy the seasonal cheer, there are many of our Veterans and people in our community who struggle and who are not as fortunate. Let's not forget about these individuals and families, and consider the opportunities we have to reach out and give back to others during the holiday season. A simple gesture toward the less-fortunate may be the best gift you give this season.

This is also a time to reflect upon the past year, and our accomplishments and challenges, whether personal or professional. At VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, I'm honored to work every day with dedicated, compassionate employees who live out our I CARE Values every single day. I see the commitment our employees have toward our Veterans to ensure we provide high-quality, timely health care. Thank you for allowing me to join your team of dedicated professionals.

***I wish you and yours the warmest wishes during this holiday season.***

## WHAT OUR PATIENTS ARE SAYING

*“I (We) are very complimentary of the care you are giving my husband. All the staff are cheerful and welcoming. Appointments are given without waits and my husband is always treated with dignity. We can't thank you enough.”*



## VA HISTORY TIDBIT

**The New York State Soldiers and Sailors Home located near Bath, N.Y., officially opened to admit Veterans for the first time 137 years ago on Christmas Day 1878.** That day, 25 disabled Civil War Veterans partook of the home's first Christmas dinner. Almost from the time that it opened, the New York Soldiers and Sailors Home's managers sought to have it included as part of the federal government's system of Civil War soldiers' homes – the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS), which was the origins of today's Veterans Health Administration. Bath and all of the former national homes continue to serve today's Veterans as Department of Veterans Affairs facilities.

# the link

this month

**FACT: VA TRAINS 120,000 HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS A YEAR, MORE THAN ANY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN THE NATION. AN ESTIMATED 70 PERCENT OF ALL U.S. DOCTORS HAVE TRAINED WITH VA.**

“After serving 11 years in the Navy both on active and reserve duty, I moved back to Omaha to be with family. But I was missing one small piece – my military family . . . The VA has given me an opportunity to be a part of that family once again.”

Trent Breci, Transportation Assistant, Business Office  
Omaha VAMC | U.S. Navy Veteran



			
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Justice-Involved Veterans Look to VA for Assistance	Meet Our Staff	NWI Leaders Work to Accelerate Transformation  Veteran Service Organizations Spread Cheer During Holidays	Celebrating Native American Heritage Month  Enjoying the Holidays Without Gaining Weight is Possible

Cover: Christmas trees decorated by NWIHCS services and local businesses are on display in the Omaha VAMC lobby as a part of the annual Great Plains PVA fundraiser to support Team Nebraska at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Photo by Anna Morelock.

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## VISIT US ONLINE

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# JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERANS LOOK TO

**W**alking from the dining hall, Omaha Correctional Center inmates peered into the meeting room windows, making hand gestures and waving to those gathered inside. Paying no attention to the passersby, a group of about 15 Veterans stood and recited the pledge of allegiance as they opened their semi-annual symposium – this one near Veterans Day, the other to be held near Memorial Day.

The Veterans Club, which is held monthly at the OCC, with the larger meetings twice a year, is one way correctional facilities in the VA Nebraska-estern Iowa Health Care System area are helping incarcerated Veterans. Just a few miles away from the prison, in downtown Omaha, about 30 Veterans looked forward to move in early November into a housing unit designed especially for them at the Douglas County Corrections Center.

Two employees from VA NWIHCS reach out to these Veterans. One of them, Veterans Justice Outreach social worker Sandra

*“Many Veterans have post-traumatic stress disorder, and serious mental illness. Through these partnerships we can link them with the needed treatment that is available versus incarcerating them.”*

*Linda Twomey,  
NWIHCS' Mental Health Specialty Programs director*



*“It matters to them to have VA here. I’m proud to be a part of the effort to help incarcerated Veterans.”*

*Sandra Miller  
Veterans Justice Outreach Social Worker, Lincoln VAMC*

Miller, drove from Lincoln to speak to the OCC Veterans’ Club. Her goal is to offer the Veterans case management and reentry assistance from the day they enter the prison system.

“It matters to them to have VA here,” Miller said. “I’m proud to be a part of the effort to help incarcerated Veterans.” Miller spoke to the group as a whole about assistance she could provide, and talked with Veterans on a one-on-one basis during the meeting.

During the club’s program, inmate Michael Tierney was recognized as the group’s “short-timer.” In 83 days, he would be released after 10 years of incarceration. In preparation for his release, Tierney met with Miller to ensure he was set up for his health care benefits, and to access his benefits for college. He planned to enroll in an auto mechanics program.

Tierney, who spent six years in the Navy with three tours in the Persian Gulf, said being a part of the Veterans’ Club at OCC helped him develop camaraderie with his fellow incarcerated Veterans. The Veterans can trust the group and share things other inmates wouldn’t understand, Tierney said.

Building camaraderie among Veterans also was a goal at the DCCC’s new Veterans Unit. Any given day, about 40 Veterans are housed in the jail. The Veterans Unit will provide unique structure and routines, and make service delivery to those Veterans more efficient, said Michael Myers, DCCC community correction manager. Another aspect is the guards in the Veterans’ unit are all Veterans themselves.



Photo by Anna Morelock

# VA FOR ASSISTANCE

BY ANNA MORELOCK Public Affairs



Linda Twomey, NWHCS' Mental Health Specialty Programs director, speaks to media during a press conference with Douglas County Corrections staff addressing the benefits of the new Veterans Housing Unit opened at the jail in November.

Tyhris Taylor, VA NWHCS' other Veterans Justice Outreach social worker, works with Veterans in the areas' jails, as well as members of the criminal justice system, to teach them about unique challenges Veterans face when involved in the justice system. It is a great interface point to offer the Veterans help with employment, housing and other concerns, Taylor said.

"Many Veterans have post-traumatic stress disorder, and serious mental illness," said Linda Twomey, NWHCS' Mental Health Specialty Programs director. "Through these partnerships we can link them with the needed treatment that is available versus incarcerating them . . . There are approximately 90,000 Veterans annually who are in jails and prisons. That represents about 10 percent of the overall 9 million prison and jail population in the United States. So we know there is work that can be done here for Veterans."

To learn more about Veterans Justice Outreach, visit [www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp](http://www.va.gov/homeless/vjo.asp).

# SHELLY



## HAJNY

**Employee Health  
Physician  
Assistant**

**1 YEAR  
LINCOLN VA CLINIC**

### WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

"I do pre-employee physicals, evaluate employee injuries, give vaccinations, perform new volunteer physicals, and work with health and wellness employees."

### WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT AT WORK?

"I like to travel, and spend time with my family. I have a 5-year-old boy. I also enjoy sports, gardening and reading."

### WHAT DO YOU ❤️ ABOUT YOUR JOB:

"I enjoy listening to people's stories. Veterans are appreciative, and are a neat group of people."

# DECEMBER

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

- Nov. 3-Dec. 9 PVA Christmas Tree Raffle in support of the Neb. National Veterans Wheelchair Games Team, Omaha
- 2 VA Food Pantry, Omaha
- 4 National Cemetery Public Meeting, Bellevue
- 7 VA Food Pantry, Lincoln
- 8 Patient Forum, Omaha
- 10 VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln
- 11 Quilts of Valor presentation, Omaha
- 16 VA Food Pantry
- 18 Coffeehaus, Lincoln
- 21 Winter begins
- 25 Christmas (Federal holiday)

# NWI Leaders Work to Accelerate TRANSFORMATION

BY ANNA MORELOCK *Public Affairs*

**VA** Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Director Don Burman recently brought a message to local leaders from Secretary Robert McDonald: change VA's culture by accelerating the myVA transformation.

## The first phase of the myVA transformation includes:

- Improving the Veteran experience,
- Improving the employee experience,
- Improving internal support services,
- Establishing a culture of continuous improvement,
- Enhancing strategic partnerships.



Photo by Anna Morelock

Dr. Grace Stringfellow, VA NWIHCS chief of staff; Angela Williams, Grand Island VA site manager; Dr. Todd Fleischer, VA NWIHCS chief of psychology; Dr. Subash Bhatia, VA NWIHCS chief of Mental Health; and Dr. Catherine Eberle, VA NWIHCS chief of Extended Care and Rehab are a part of the group assigned to review complex coding to ensure VA resources are allocated correctly based on patient diagnoses.

During a two-day workshop, VA NWIHCS leaders identified issues facing the organization ranging from work processes and infrastructure to morale and employee engagement. Leaders split into four groups to begin working on identified opportunities for which they will report out in 100 days.

## VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS SPREAD CHEER THROUGHOUT VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM DURING THE HOLIDAYS



Photo by Anna Morelock

Through Dec. 9, the Great Plains Paralyzed Veterans of America sold chances to win decorated Christmas trees and wreaths. The trees were decorated by VA NWIHCS departments, as well as local businesses. All proceeds for this annual event go to support Team Nebraska as they participate each year in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

# EMPLOYEE Update

## WELCOME

**Charles Bailey**, Environmental Management Service  
**Charles Blankman**, Surgery  
**Essex Bosan**, Voluntary Service  
**Mary Cameron**, Mental Health  
**Jeanette Deloa**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Gary Dismuke**, Dental  
**Jennifer Godek**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Roger Goettsche**, Environmental Management Service  
**Perry Haase**, Lincoln Nursing  
**David Hanson**, Environmental Management Service  
**Heather Hawley**, Pharmacy  
**Lakisha Hazley**, Extended Care and Rehab

**Detrick Hill**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Lee Hoff**, Engineering  
**Kelly Hohlen**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine  
**Stacey Kleint**, Mental Health  
**Joan Koneck-Wilcox**, Mental Health  
**Justin Liefers**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Ryan Mairs**, Vet Center  
**Daniel McGuire**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Kristen Miller**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Alexander Misiunas**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Lashundia Mosala**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Juile Moullet**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Okey Obryant**, Outpatient Nursing

**Dawn Panec**, Extended Care and Rehab  
**Robert Payne**, Voluntary Service  
**Rebecca Schmidt**, Mental Health  
**Douglas Sennett**, Voluntary Services  
**Larry Siref**, Surgery  
**Jeffrey Stokes**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine  
**Danyelle Stuck**, Extended Care and Rehab  
**Mark Sutherland**, Environmental Management Service  
**Cathy Tsuchiyama**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Chere Washington**, Outpatient Nursing  
**Jessica Wolters**, Inpatient Nursing

## LEAVING

**Oct. 4 to Nov. 14, 2015**  
**Harmon Barta**, Mental Health  
**Scott Bernier**, Prosthetics  
**Lori Bultman**, Director's Office  
**Patrick Daly**, Research  
**Jessica Ehlers**, Extended Care and Rehab  
**Dan Green**, Office of Information and Technology  
**Candece Danyl Hansen**, Clinical Nutrition  
**Else Hess**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Nancy Long**, Inpatient Nursing  
**Christopher Tremblay**, Logistics

**Jennifer Anderson**, Extended Care and Rehab  
**Paul Ferrin**, Engineering  
**Jeremy Gross**, Environmental Management Service  
**Lashawn McCarty**, Surgery  
**Barbara Wenz**, Grand Island Nursing

## RETIRING

**Rita Czaplewski**, Grand Island Nursing  
**Roy Hargrove**, Food Service  
**Janice Peters**, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine  
**Margaret Watkins**, OEF/OIF/OND

# CELEBRATING NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



Photo by Anna Morelock

**Nicole Tomayo-Bergman, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, spoke to VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System staff for Native American Heritage Month. Tomayo-Bergman's sons, Carlos and Israel (pictured), also performed native songs and dances for the group. The program was a part of the Equal Employment Opportunities Native American Special Emphasis Program.**

## What is your favorite part of the HOLIDAYS?



**Terry Scherff, RN**  
Primary Care/Employee Health,  
Grand Island

"I love Thanksgiving, with all of the food, without gifts. Family are the gifts. I enjoy the decorations and spending time with family."



"Being with family."

**Linda Todd**  
Human Resources Assistant,  
Grand Island VA

"Spending time with family, and giving presents"

**Ann Vigil**  
VAMC Liaison, VA Regional Office



"Family is the best part of the holidays."

**Raul de Velasco Jr**  
Chief, VA Police Services, NWIHCS  
U.S. Army Veteran

## ENJOYING THE HOLIDAYS WITHOUT GAINING WEIGHT IS POSSIBLE

*Practice these few simple tips from VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's dietitians.*

### EAT REGULAR MEALS:

Just like any other day, it is important to eat a meal or snack every four hours. This will help you eat fewer calories throughout the day and avoid overeating at the holiday meal. Start your day with a nutrient-packed breakfast by including a lean protein, whole grains and fruit. Include fiber foods like whole grains and fruit at your meals and snacks. These foods are low in calories and will help satisfy hunger.

### TAKE SMALLER PORTIONS OF ALL FOODS:

Include nutrient-dense foods (such as fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy, whole grains and lean protein) in your diet, but keep in mind these foods also contain calories. Keep in mind proper portion size when consuming all foods. Fill one-half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables, one-quarter of your plate with a lean protein and take small portions of starchy foods in order to fill one-quarter of your plate.

### PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING:

Start by using a smaller plate, about 8 to 9 inches. This will allow you to take smaller portions and still feel like you have a full plate, while not feeling deprived. Put your fork and knife down in between bites, put your hands on your lap, and chew your food. Pay attention to the texture and taste of your food. Once you swallow, pick up your fork and knife again and get your next bite. Don't pre-load your fork in between bites. Wait 10 minutes before getting seconds, allowing yourself time to see if you are really still hungry.

### CHOOSE TO BE THE TALKER:

Spend more time catching up and talking with family and friends. This will help you slow down, feel fuller faster and eat less.

### GET EXTRA PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:

Find some time before or after your meal to do some physical activity. This can be a good time to go for a walk or to play a game of basketball or football with friends and family. Make activity fun!





U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# STAND BY THEM

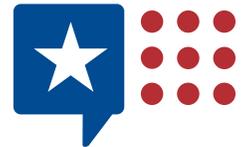
## HELP A VETERAN IN CRISIS

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