

# the link

AUGUST  
2013



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



**6** NEW 'PATIENTS'  
CHALLENGE  
CLINIC STAFF



Last week, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System received its visit from The Joint Commission. Survey teams evaluated our hospital and outpatient systems of care, life and safety systems in the medical center as a whole, and specifically looked at other programs including the Community Living Center in Grand Island, our Behavioral Health programs and Home-Based Primary Care.

During their visit, survey team members visited work areas, talked with staff and evaluated records to make sure policies and procedures were followed and documented appropriately. In their review, they saw what I know we provide everyday – excellent care to Veterans.

The survey team had many positive comments about VA NWIHCS and its staff. Some of the things they mentioned included our expansive telehealth program, exceptional quality homecare and patient-aligned care teams that work as groups and use data to improve care. As a data-driven organization, we use that knowledge to provide and improve upon exceptional service to Veterans. However, without the most important element – our extremely caring and mission-focused employees – our care would not have received the accolades it did.

On behalf of the executive leadership team, I would like to thank every VA NWIHCS staff member for their professionalism, dedication and commitment to serving Veterans.

*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: DURING WORLD WAR II, A GROUP OF NAVAJO MEN USED THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE TO QUICKLY TRANSMIT MESSAGES FOR THE U.S. MARINES. THEY ARE CREDITED WITH SAVING THOUSANDS OF LIVES AND HELPING TO END WWII. AUG. 14 IS RECOGNIZED AS NAVAJO CODE TALKERS DAY. VISIT WWW.NAVAJOCODETALKERS.ORG.

Cover: Pam Florea, RN, works with a horse at Unbridled Acres during a staff training exercise. Florea and other Red Clinic staff were at the stable to work on team building. Courtesy photo.

“Just like our motto, we are serving those who served us. I didn’t serve in the military and (working for the VA) is one way I feel I can contribute. By helping the Veteran, we are helping the country. We all have the same mission, to serve Veterans. That is the bottom line, and I believe we owe the Veterans that.”

James Crouch  
Outpatient Pharmacist and  
Health Revenue Center Officer  
Omaha VA Medical Center



# the link

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Lincoln volunteers pitch in to beautify grounds



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

## benny marks

Item Manager, Logistics  
Omaha VA  
Medical Center

**How long have you been a VA employee?**

"21 years"

**What does your job entail?**

"I order all of the medical supplies for the clinics, wards and specialty clinics. I also order any special supplies needed for individual patients."

**What is your favorite thing about your job?**

"To be honest, I love doing it because I have the opportunity to help Veterans get well. I am a Veteran myself and I was injured. I have been in military hospitals and now I am on the other side and able to help."

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

"I love old cars. I have a 1988 Chevy Caprice that I bought brand new. I work on engines, brakes, and wax and buff them. I am also remodeling my house. My house belonged to my grandma; it was built in 1916. I recently fixed the cracked foundation." 📍



Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

**A**fter 22 years in the Army, Heidi Martin found a new purpose in life – helping fellow Veterans find jobs. Martin is a certified career counselor and the regional employment coordinator for VA for Vets, a Department of Veterans Affairs program designed to bring servicemembers and Veterans together with federal jobs that fit their skills.

Besides offering supervisors tools to hire and retain Veterans, the program helps Veterans translate their military skills into civilian resumes. Martin encourages all Veterans to log on to the website, create a profile and upload their resumes. Besides the military skills translator, Veterans also can access 24/7 resume coaches, self assessments and resources for reintegration and online training.

**“I tell Veterans if you don’t know what you are going to do when you grow up, do the military translator; put all your skill sets in there and see what pops.”**

Heidi Martin | Regional Employment Coordinator

For service-connected Veterans and those who served in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, special hiring preferences are available. After these Veterans have entered their resumes into the VA for Vets database, supervisors can go in and search the skill sets they need. Hiring managers can contact VA for Vets to use Veterans Recruitment Appointments, which were implemented to increase Veteran hiring without requiring a vacancy announcement.

To use the special hiring process to fill positions up to and including GS-11 positions, hiring managers should contact Martin via email including the job title, position description, salary and any other information pertinent to the job. Martin can search a database of enrolled Veterans and reach out to other networks to find a Veteran who matches the skill set required. 📍

### Visit Our Social Media Sites



Like Us on Facebook  
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Follow @VANWIHCS

Get news, information for patients and upcoming events

Veterans are encouraged to enter their resumes into the Career Center on the VA for Vets website, [www.vaforvets.va.gov](http://www.vaforvets.va.gov).

For more information about VA for Vets, contact Martin at [heidi.martin3@va.gov](mailto:heidi.martin3@va.gov) or 214-552-8365, or visit [www.vaforvets.va.gov](http://www.vaforvets.va.gov).

# Veterans enrolled for VA care

*meet requirements under new health care law*

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

**T**he Affordable Care Act, also known as the health care law, was created to expand access to affordable health care coverage to all Americans, lower costs and improve quality and care coordination.

The good news is Veterans and family members enrolled in any of these VA health care programs meet the new requirement for coverage under the standards of the health care law:

- Veteran's health care program
- Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA)
- Spina bifida health care program

Veterans enrolled in VA health care do not need to take additional steps to meet the health care law coverage standards. The law does not change VA health benefits or Veterans' out-of-pocket costs.

Veterans not enrolled for VA health care benefits are encouraged to apply by visiting [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll), calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or visiting one of VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's facilities to pick up and submit an Application for Medical Benefits, VA Form 10-10EZ.

Under the health care law beginning in 2014, people will have health coverage that meets a minimum standard (enrollment in VA health care benefits covers this requirement), qualify for an exemption or make a payment when filing their taxes if they have affordable options but remain uninsured.

Beginning Oct. 1, the Health Insurance Marketplace will be a new way to shop and purchase private health insurance. Although VA health care covers the minimum law standard for insurance, Veterans can continue to use VA for all of their health care needs, or complement it with private health insurance or coverage by other federal health care programs, including Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE. 

Information about the Health Care Marketplace is at [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov).

Additional information about ACA and VA benefits is available at [www.va.gov/ACA](http://www.va.gov/ACA).



## Questions & Answers about the Affordable Care Act

**Q.** What happens if I don't have health coverage?

**A.** Those who have access to affordable coverage yet remain uninsured starting in 2014 may have to make a payment when filing their federal income taxes.

**Q.** I am enrolled in VA health care. Would I be eligible for assistance to pay health insurance premiums on the Health Care Marketplace if I choose to purchase health care outside of VA?

**A.** Although it's your choice to purchase private health insurance on or off of the marketplace, since VA meets the ACA coverage requirement, you wouldn't be eligible for assistance to lower your external insurance premium costs from VA.

**Q.** Are my family members who aren't eligible for VA or other federal health care programs eligible for assistance to purchase health care insurance?

**A.** Many options are available to those family members not eligible for VA health care benefits. The marketplace provides answers at [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov).

**Q.** Can I cancel my VA health care coverage?

**A.** Yes. However, acceptance for future VA health care coverage will be based on eligibility factors at the time of applications, which may result in a denial of benefits.

# Horses help staff connect, commu

TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISE TAKES CLINIC TO NEBRASKA STABLE

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

**P**atient-aligned care team members from VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's Red Clinic at the Omaha VA Medical Center recently spent a day taking care of a different kind of "patient." At Unbridled Acres, a stable in Blair, Neb., the team gathered to continue their team-building journey in the form of equine psychotherapy.

The Red Clinic is staffed with resident physicians. The teaching dynamic in the clinic makes for a unique setting as providers change more frequently than other PACT teams.

"For any team, in or outside of the VA, a big struggle is coping with various personalities, various methods of problem solving and various layers of responsibility," said Larra Petersen-Luekenda, MA, Ph.D., NWIHCS staff psychologist and health behavior coordinator. Petersen-Luekenda coaches the Red Clinic in team building.

While the resident physicians rotate in and out of the clinic, other staff have been around for years. Dee Fultz, RN and nurse manager in the Red Clinic, has been with VA for more than 14 years. Fultz organized the daylong training at Unbridled Acres for the staff to improve their cohesiveness as a team.

At the stable, the group was split into separate teams. Each team was assigned a horse for the day. All of the horses had very different personalities and were deliberately paired with teams that would benefit most from traits. Team members with strong, direct communication styles were paired with a horse that did not respond well to that approach.

The first task of the day was to rope and harness the team horse. Most of the employees had never worked with horses, and many had never been on a farm. With no further instructions than to rope and harness the horse, it left a lot of room for trial and error. Fultz's team was assigned Jill, one of the more stubborn horses.

Despite their best efforts, Fultz's strong-willed, four-person team was unable to get Jill to cooperate. Pam Florea, RN, was on Fultz's team and recognized during the task it didn't matter that they had a team of strong-willed individuals. Jill was worn out from the failed attempts before the team could come up with a plan. Ultimately they couldn't rope and harness her.

Right: Tobbie Elliff, LPN; Mary Beth Baulisch, RN; and Caroline Campbell, LPN, feed their horse a treat during a recent training. Staff were paired with horses based on their personalities and had to work together in teams to accomplish set tasks.

Below: DeeDee McCormick, RN, leads a horse to a set space in the stable yard during a recent team-building training at a stable in Blair, Neb.



“If you don't have a common goal and common plan and communication, you are never going to get anywhere. It was very enlightening to fail. I don't think any of us on that team were accustomed to failing.”

Pam Florea, RN, Red Clinic

The irritants of the day, such as the hot weather, added an element of stress that was key to uncovering common responses to being uncomfortable, said Sue Miller-Harson, the stable owner. ▶



► “In our culture we all want to be comfortable. We like air conditioning and we don’t like the flies,” she said. “So what if it is hot? Can you do what you need to do even though you are not comfortable? Do you need to be comfortable in order to achieve a goal?”

Getting out of the work space to work on team development also was beneficial. “When we are touching the earth, we are different people than we are at the office,” Miller-Harson said. “It takes away some of the stiffness and comfort of the office. When we come there, we are all just the same.”

Miller-Harson has been a therapist for more than 20 years. She grew up around horses and has witnessed the powerful connections humans have with horses.

*(continued on page 9)* ►



“I learned a lot about me. Who I am. Where I am going. Climbing the hill, working with the horses. This was a total team building workshop. Loved it.”

**Tina Parker-Dawkins, LPN | Red Clinic**

“I loved seeing everybody working together and cheering each other on. The experience left me refreshed and renewed in more areas than work.”

**Nancy Vaughn, LPN | Red Clinic**



“Learning more about each member of the Red Clinic including the many talents everyone has to share.”

**Mary Beth Baulisen, RN | Red Clinic**

“The best part of our team building experience to me was initially the first experience of the day, catching and harnessing the horse. No one knew what they were doing or what to expect, but we all worked together until we got the job and had (the horse) harnessed.”

**Lynn Anderson, LPN | Red Clinic**



# Swimming for life

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

**T**hree years ago, now 74-year-old U.S. Army Veteran Roger Holthaus, had a major heart attack that could have been fatal. His cardiologist told him he survived because he was in good physical condition, a large credit to his dedication to swimming.

Holthaus began swimming as a junior at Hastings (Neb.) High School. He took to the water and never wanted to give it up. During his time in the Army Medical Service Corps, he swam every morning in the officer's club and was given many chances to swim for the Army.

After separating from the service in 1964, Holthaus pursued a master's degree at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln in political science. He signed a teaching contract at South Dakota School of Mines in Technology. Holthaus said those three years as a teacher were some of the best of his life. However, he turned down tenure to pursue a career in law.

In 1972, he graduated from Creighton University Law School and became a deputy Douglas County attorney. During his years as a lawyer, he spent his lunch hours in the pool.

**“I swim as my therapy.”**

Roger Holthaus | U.S. Army Veteran

Holthaus recently competed in the Iowa Senior Olympic Games where he won four silver medals and a gold medal in his age division for swimming. He said he likes the structure of the Senior Olympics.



Photo by Bruce Thiel

Roger Holthaus poses with his swimming medals from the Iowa Senior Olympics. Holthaus said swimming is his therapy and he plans to participate in the sport as long as he can.

**“The competition makes it less boring. You have something to look forward to. You can set some goals, and there is a good camaraderie among swimmers.”**

Roger Holthaus | U.S. Army Veteran

Holthaus has acute arthritis in his knees from hours spent squatting in the mud during his time in Korea. “You could be ankle deep in mud but still choke on the dust,” he said about his time overseas.

Staying in shape to compete means daily workouts, frequent appointments in physical therapy and determination.

“I keep a log of how long I work out every day and what my weight is. It gives me an incentive to work out,” he said.

Gina Wessel, LPN, has seen Holthaus in the Red Clinic at the Omaha VA Medical Center for a few years. “He is a very proactive

(continued on page 10) ►

## HELLO

June 2 to 29

**Kristine Bailey,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Debra Benish,**  
Veterans Canteen  
Service

**Bryan Blum,** Finance

**Jennifer Buszkohl,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Jodie Cieslik,**  
Pharmacy

**Carrie Ann Cropp,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Brian Crytzer,** Police

**Heather Eller-  
Gilman,** Mental Health

**Jodi Fleissner,**  
Student

**Sarah Fredrickson,**  
Prosthetics

**Priscilla Genereux,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Jennifer Green,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Gregory Gordon,**  
Imaging

**Tabatha Harders,**  
Geriatric and Extended  
Care

**Kyle Hester,** Police

**Michael Hughes,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Peggy Lechner,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Wendy Little Elk,**  
Veterans Canteen  
Service

**Susan Magill,** Mental  
Health

**McKenzie McCarter,**  
Mental Health

**Laci Namken,** Surgery

**Natalia Osna,**  
Research

**Brian Owings,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Susan Paup,** Primary  
Care and Specialty  
Medicine

**Mark Pedginski,**  
Pharmacy

**Charles Ross,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Randy Saathoff,**  
Veterans Canteen  
Service

**Terry Scales,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Ross Venditte,** Police

**Alan Weidner,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Kevin Welch,**  
Pharmacy

**Barbara Wenz,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Lisa White,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Neil Whitefoot,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Randy Wobser,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Christopher Yates,**  
Pharmacy

## GOODBYE

**Kevin Boswell,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Amy Onstott,** Primary  
Care and Specialty  
Medicine

**Katrina Schneider,**  
Research

**William Marcil,**  
Mental Health

**Robert McCrory,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

**Daniel Meinke,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Brandy Reineke,**  
Primary Care and  
Specialty Medicine

## RETIRING

May 19 to June 29

**Linda Harwood,**  
Business Office

**Jack Dover,** Lab

**Ronald Stockwell,**  
Mental Health

**Raymond Carter,**  
Nurse Executive's Office

**David Anderson,**  
Police

**Nancy Walkenhorst,**  
Research

**Charles Garcia,**  
Environmental  
Management Service

**Ellen Lloyd,** Surgery

**Janet Hanon,** Vet  
Center

## What do you think defines good CUSTOMER SERVICE?

“Going above and beyond. I always follow up and make sure they have everything they need.”

**Amy Patten**  
Financial Administrative Specialist  
Omaha VAMC



“Providing someone with helpful information even if it is not within your scope of duties, whether it is for patients or fellow health care employees.”



**Mandi Herdzina**  
Inpatient Pharmacist | Omaha VAMC

“Having a smile on your face when they arrive at the desk and greeting them right away. Making sure they know all of their appointments for the day if they have more than one. Making sure they are comfortable while they wait.”



**Kristen Beiermann**  
Medical Support Assistant | Omaha VAMC

“The customer is always right. Good customer service is working with customers and taking the time to explain things so they leave satisfied.”



**Floyd Williams**  
Supply Tech, Logistics | Omaha VAMC

“I was always taught that the customer is always right. Do whatever it takes for the Veteran.”



**Brian Williams**  
Inpatient Pharmacist | Omaha VAMC

► **Team-Building Training continued from page 7**

“The mind becomes calmer by attaching to horses,” she said. “There is something very nurturing and tender about a horse.”

Equine psychotherapy is often used to treat autism and behavioral problems. However, the therapy also can be used as an approach to corporate team building.

Since the training, the Red Clinic team members still refer to their problem-solving attempts from the training as a point of reference they can apply to circumstances in clinic.

They often find themselves thinking back to the day and asking themselves, “What did we do when we couldn’t accomplish that task?” Then they apply the same

approaches to problems in clinic.

“They can say, well remember what happened with Jill. It takes away the defensiveness,” Miller-Harson said. “They can fall back to a common memory and a common problem that they solved. What did they do at the barn how can they bring it to the hospital?”

# Veterans bring home **23** medals from Wheelchair Games

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

**E**leven Nebraska and Iowa Veterans competed as Team Nebraska in the 33rd National Veterans Wheelchair Games

July 13 to 18 in Tampa, Fla. They brought home 23 medals: 12 gold, seven silver and four bronze.

Team Nebraska's members included Dave Nelson, Randy Squier, Tamara Lawter, John Scott, John Beach, Richard Cover, Roy Gray, Greg Wade, Garrett Hardy, Rick Conley and Mike Moore. All are members of the Great Plains chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Nearly 600 athletes from across the United States, Great Britain and Puerto Rico competed in the games, which is the world's largest annual multi-sport wheelchair event for military Veterans.

John Scott, a U.S. Air Force Veteran who competed in his fourth wheelchair games, said the event enables him to participate in a sport he did in his youth—archery. He won a gold medal.

Tamara Lawter, who competed in her 17th wheelchair games and earned three gold and two silver medals, said she mentors newer participants in the PVA chapter to show them life after an injury can be very fulfilling.

Adaptive sports show Veterans they can do as much as anyone, or more, Lawter said.



Dave Nelson (back), a U.S. Navy Veteran from Omaha, Neb., competed in hand cycling at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Tampa, Fla. He earned first place in the race.

That's the focus of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Adaptive Sports program.

"The Wheelchair Games, one of VA's six adaptive sports programs, give Veterans opportunities to stay active and participate in activities to help them learn that their injuries or disabilities don't define them," said Jordan Schupach, public affairs officer for the VA's National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events.

The games featured 18 events and two exhibition events with athletes competing against their peers according to wheelchair sports experience and agility. The games were presented by VA and PVA with a goal to improve Veterans' quality of life and foster better health through sports competition. 

Learn more about VA's adaptive sports programs and partnerships at [www.va.gov/adaptivesports](http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports).

► *Swimming continued from page 8*

person," she said. "He makes it easy to care for him."

Heart attacks can happen to anyone, but staying in good shape can increase chances to survive a traumatic medical situation. "People have heart attacks, healthy or not," Wessel said. "However, if you put yourself in good physical condition you just give yourself better chances, and he is living proof of that."

Although Holthaus retired this January, he has no plans to slow down his swimming routine.

"I intend to keep working out until I can't anymore," he said. "That is my therapy to keep living."

Holthaus will compete in the Nebraska Senior Games Aug. 10. He plans to compete in backstroke, butterfly and the individual medley. Holthaus said he is best known for his butterfly stroke. "That is really the hardest one. You are doing both arms at the same time."

Holthaus will compete in the Nebraska Senior Games at 9 a.m. Aug. 10, at the Harman Pool, 3207 Seventh Ave. in Kearney, Neb. 



Photo by Bruce Thiel

Photo by Bruce Thiel

Ron Schleiger, Terry Carpick, Terry Gillispie, Gailen Young and Jim Townsley pose outside the Lincoln VA facility at the Medal of Honor monument. The group volunteered to clean up the memorial, which was originally dedicated in 1976.

## Lincoln Volunteers

### PITCH IN TO BEAUTIFY GROUNDS

Bruce Thiel | Medical Media  
Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

**V**olunteers at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System in Lincoln have been pitching in around campus to clean up the grounds. One of their latest projects was to unearth an old monument dedicated in 1976 to American Medal of Honor recipients. With the help of the site manager and engineering staff, the volunteers cleaned up the area around the monument stone, added a concrete pad, plants and benches.

“The old flagstone was all crumbly, and it was actually a trip hazard for people to come out, said Jim Townsley, one of the Veteran volunteers. “We want to make it more prominent, and make it a little bit better looking, so that Veterans can come out here and enjoy this.”

Volunteers who helped with the project included Townsley, Ron Schleiger, Terry Carpick, Terry Gillispie, Gailen Young and Dale Darling. 

To learn more about the Lincoln Veterans Council, call Terry Gillispie at 402-499-0230.

## EVENTS what's going on?

- Aug. 4-10 Assistance Dog Week
- Aug. 5 VA Food Pantry, Lincoln
- Aug. 6 Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Omaha
- Understanding Pain Management, A live VA television program for caregivers, Omaha
- Aug. 7 Farmers Market, Lincoln
- VA Food Pantry, Omaha
- Aug. 8 Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Grand Island
- Aug. 14 Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Omaha and Grand Island
- Farmers Market, Lincoln
- Veterans Forum, Lincoln
- Aug. 16 VA Coffeehouse, Lincoln
- Aug. 20 Patient-Centered Care Employee Retreat, Omaha
- Aug. 21 VA Food Pantry, Omaha
- Farmers Market, Lincoln
- Aug. 26 Women's Equality Day
- Aug. 28 Farmers Market, Lincoln
- VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln

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



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