the link

SEPTEMBER 2013

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

6 WELCOMING VETERANS HOME

eye on nwi

Marci Mylan, Ph.D., MHA | Director

The All-Employee Survey measures factors like employee satisfaction, organizational climate, high-performing workplaces, workgroup perceptions, supervisory behaviors and turnover. It's important to take the time to answer the survey to let leadership at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and VA-wide know what is important, what is working and what can be improved.

Great news! Beginning Sept. 9, the survey will be offered online this year, which will be new for VA NWIHCS. Fewer questions are included this year, and employees will have the opportunity to add comments in two sections – one on workplace strengths and the other on areas for improvement.

Data from the All-Employee Survey is shared down to the workgroup level if there are 10 or more responses. As leaders, we don't see individual responses, only the workgroup data to ensure employee confidentiality. Results of the survey for all VA employees to access also will be available online at http://aes.vssc.med.va.gov/Presentations/ at some point after the survey is concluded.

I encourage each employee to take the time to fill out the All-Employee Survey so we can hear what you think about our system and how we can make it even better.

Marci Mylan

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FACT: PATIENT-CENTERED CARE MONTH IS CELEBRATED IN OCTOBER. KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR INFORMATION ON ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATIONAL EVENTS TAKING PLACE DURING OCTOBER FOR VETERANS AND EMPLOYEES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT VA NWIHCS' PATIENT-CENTERED CARE JOURNEY.

Cover: "Home is where you dig it" reads the sign over a fighting bunker in Vietnam in 1968. National Archives photo.

the link

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"Freedom is never free. We see the price our Veterans have paid for our freedoms everyday."

Donna Peter, RN
Case Manager
Bellevue Community-Based Outpatient Clinic

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

meet michelle holmes

Licensed Practical Nurse
Shenandoah Community-Based Outpatient Clinic

How long have employee?
"4 years"

What does your job entail?
"Taking care of patients, drawing labs, ordering supplies, timekeeping."

What is your favorite thing about your job?
"Taking care of patients."

When not at work, where can you be found?
"At home, outside working with my horses especially my new filly Daisy. High school football games and spending time with my family."

Visit Our Social Media Sites

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www.facebook.com/NebraskaIowaVA

Follow @VANWIHCS

Get news, information for patients and upcoming events

EMPLOYEE FITNESS

Be your healthiest self

- *Fitness centers in Lincoln and Omaha*
- *Personal training*
- *Yoga*
- *Weight training*
- *Nutrition classes*
- *Weight-loss classes*
- *Smoking cessation*

Call Quin Kelly at ext. 5972 in Omaha or ext. 7902 in Lincoln to join.

Conducting Vet-to-Vet interviews

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

The Omaha Veterans Advisory Group is interested in what Veterans have to say. Since April, the group members have been conducting Veteran-to-Veteran interviews with inpatients at the Omaha VA Medical Center. Among the questions, surveyors ask patients if their expectations are being met, what staff can do better and if the patients would recommend the Omaha VAMC to other Veterans.

Photo By Anna Morelock

Doug DeVries, an inpatient on 7East at the Omaha VA Medical Center, completes a survey for Fred Barnes, a member of the Veterans Advisory Group. Since they began surveying inpatients in April, the group has collected 146 responses.

The Veterans Advisory Group began their efforts by placing comment boxes in the outpatient clinics to collect Veteran feedback. At one of their regular monthly meetings, the group realized they were missing an important population – those receiving inpatient care, said Dick Harrington, the group's chairman.

Each week, volunteers from the group head to the inpatient rooms to collect input from patients. If there is a problem that needs addressed immediately, the volunteer surveyor works with the nurse manager on the floor to get it resolved. Other comments, complaints and complements are taken to the patient advocates, the director and other appropriate staff members.

In just five months, the group has collected 146 surveys. The results show Omaha VAMC staff are meeting inpatients' expectations 93 percent of the time. Ninety-two percent are satisfied with the communication they receive from staff. Out of 140 responses to the questions, "Would you recommend the VA hospital to others," 138 Veterans answered yes.

Besides responding to the in-person interviews, Veterans are encouraged to leave comments at any time in the comment boxes located in patient waiting areas. Through VA, patients also receive surveys through the mail after their discharge about their care.

EVIDENCE &caring

Recognizing Excellence in Nursing at VA NWIHCS

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

In 2009, nursing staff began a journey to bring Caring Science into their practice at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. Nurse Researcher Peggy Gound, DNP, APRN-NP, BC, worked with other nurses to identify a nursing theorist and create a nursing practice model. The group has hosted conferences, created a journal club, and collaborated with VA NWIHCS' Research Service. This year, their efforts have received national attention inside and outside of VA.

Earlier this year, nursing staff led a conference, Evidence-Based Practice and Caring Science Day: The Intersection between Evidence and Caring, which was attended by almost 50 nurses and social workers from VA NWIHCS. Networking between presenters and staff led to several initiatives and opportunities.

Ronda Fritz, RN, VA NWIHCS' safe patient handling coordinator and a presenter at the conference, connected with another presenter, Suzy Harrington, DNP, RN, MCHES, the director of the American Nurses Association's Department for Health, Safety and Wellness. After a tour and demonstration of some of VA NWIHCS' safe-patient handling initiatives, Fritz was invited to help the ANA roll out its new standards for safe-patient handling.

Watson Caring Science Institute

In August, VA NWIHCS was approved to become a national affiliate of the Watson Caring Science Institute. An invitation to become a member is only given to institutions that have made significant progress in creating a caring environment.

Kay Ryan, Ph.D., RN, spoke at the conference about her work with a cancer survivorship program that will be implemented at VA NWIHCS. The program, called A Time to Heal, is a 12-week rehabilitation program for cancer survivors and their caregivers. The research-based program, which should start in the spring with two sessions each year, will be helpful for Veterans, Gound said, and teach them about various topics such as nutrition, exercise and meditation.

Besides creating connections to showcase work being done at VA NWIHCS, the conference and other caring initiatives also have staff excited about evidence-based practice and incorporating caring into their work, Gound said. She spoke with nursing leadership at two other VAs about how VA NWIHCS began its journey with evidence-based practice and caring theory.

Nurses at any level can get involved in research and caring initiatives at VA NWIHCS, Gound said. Many nurses work on projects as a part of a degree program. A caring advocates group discusses how caring initiatives that benefit staff and patients can be incorporated into nursing. The journal club, nursing and evidence-based practice classes, and a research fellowship also are available for nurses to get involved in furthering the profession of nursing at VA NWIHCS.

Dr. Peggy Gound will present information on VA NWIHCS' caring journey at the International Caritas Consortium Oct. 10-12 in Oak Brook, Ill. To learn more about the conference and caring science, visit www.watsoncaringscience.org.

50 years later

HEALING WOUNDS, COMMEMORATING A W

When it was their time to deploy, Vietnam Veterans often flew off to war on their own as replacements for those who were killed or returned home. After a year in country, they returned home alone to an often hostile and misunderstanding population. This is one of the major differences between those who served in Vietnam and those who served in World War II, Iraq and other conflicts, said Dr. William Keller, a psychologist at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

In World War II, servicemembers would come home as units on ships where they had time to talk to each other about what had happened and those they lost, Keller said. They could, to some extent, process their experiences. Today, units come home together to ceremonies and surprise homecomings aired on local television stations.

Because of the dislike of the war in the United States, Vietnam Veterans were often told not to talk about their experiences. Dave, a Vietnam Veteran, who asked to remain anonymous, was spit on and called names when he came home from basic training for his father's funeral. He hadn't even been to war yet.

Vietnam Veterans, "they were never welcomed home," Dave said. "What they got was a wall in Washington with the names of all of their friends and comrades who had fallen, but what have we done for all of those servicemen and women who didn't get killed? We've done nothing."

Because of this, Dave makes it a point to welcome home Vietnam Veterans wherever he may meet them. He starts by asking if "they were in" and what years they served. "Did you hop the pond?" is his follow up. For those who say "yes," he holds out a hand and brings his mouth close to their ears. "I don't care what this country said and did, and I don't care what the people felt and said and did. To me you are a hero. Welcome home." Many of the Veterans tell Dave no one has ever welcomed them home before. His efforts, he said, also help him heal.

"It made just a very difficult, lonely situation for them," said Keller, who has been treating Veterans in Lincoln for 42 years.

Clinicians at the time, Keller said, didn't know much about what the Vietnam Veterans were experiencing either. According to VA, approximately 30 percent of Vietnam Veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Often, that was coupled with substance use disorders.

Vietnam War 50th Commemoration

In Accordance With Public Law 110-181 SEC.598; the 2008 Na Act authorized the Secretary of Defense to conduct a progra anniversary of the Vietnam War and "in conducting the com Secretary shall coordinate, support, and facilitate other prog Federal Government, State and local governments, and othe commemoration of the Vietnam War."

Greg Holloway, an Army Veteran who served and was woun acting as the chair for the commemoration in Nebraska. The in Nebraska about Vietnam, Holloway said. Partners also are programs to help with education. "It's not necessarily to honor the war, but to educate," Holloway said. "What we did, how we did it, why we did it, and just to help bring everything together so people understand a little bit better what the conflict was all about."

For more information on the commemoration in Nebraska, call Holloway at 402-890-2756 or visit www.vietnamwar50th.com.

Greg Holloway (left) and other Soldiers in his squad get ready to leave on a patrol in 1968 while serving in Vietnam.

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

VAR

tional Defense Authorization
m to commemorate the 50th
memorative program, the
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r persons and organizations in

ded in Vietnam in 1968, is
main goal is to educate people
being asked to sign up to host

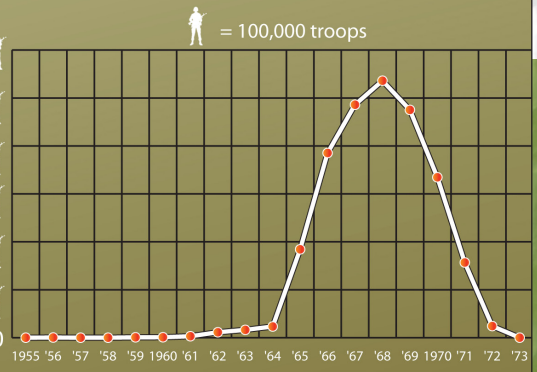
Courtesy Photo

STATISTICS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The average U.S. infantryman in Vietnam saw about **240 days of combat in one year,** thanks to the mobility of the helicopter. In comparison, the average infantry in the South Pacific during World War II saw only 40 days of combat in four years.

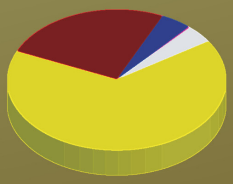
U.S. forces sent to Vietnam were the **highest educated** of all previously deployed armies. **79% had at least a high school degree** prior to entering military service.

U.S. Troop Strength by Year End (1955 - 1973)



U.S. ARMED FORCES TOLL OF WAR (1955-1975)

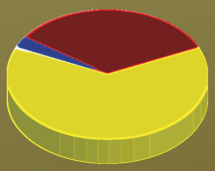
KILLED



The total amount of U.S. armed forces killed in Vietnam in the two decades of involvement was **58,253**.

Of these, there were:
38,224 Army,
14,844 Marines,
2,586 Air Force,
2,566 Navy,
26 Merchant Marines
7 Coast Guard.

WOUNDED



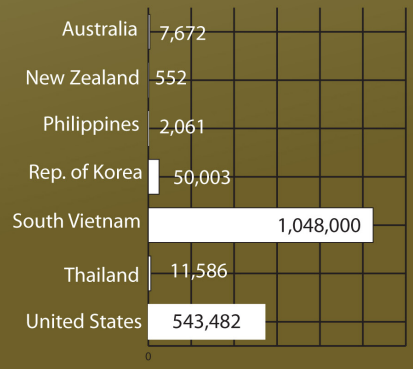
The total number of U.S. armed forces non-mortally wounded in Vietnam was **153,363.**

Of these, there were:
96,802 Army,
51,392 Marines,
931 Air Force,
4,178 Navy,
60 Coast Guard.

In 1973, 2,646 U.S. military personnel were considered POW/MIA in South East Asia. 1,971 were in Vietnam, 575 in Laos. 90 in Cambodia, and 10 in China.

As of 2010, 1,698 are still unaccounted for.

PEAK STRENGTH OF ALLIED ARMED FORCES DURING VIETNAM WAR



In an alcohol treatment program he facilitated around the end of the Vietnam War, Keller said Veterans would often start talking about their experiences in combat instead of their drinking. In therapy groups, Veterans would discuss their experiences without knowing how to handle the emotions that brought to the surface. Then, often, they would drink to forget about the experiences. The Seeking Safety program was finally developed to combine therapies for substance abuse and PTSD, Keller said.

"What we learned was we don't give them treatment where we go after the trauma until they have developed coping mechanisms to deal with the trauma," Keller said. "If we get triggered, how do we get ourselves out from under those painful feelings? How do we get those stopped? Now we've got evidence-based therapies that are really effective, so all of the current Veterans are benefitting from what they've learned from the Vietnam Veterans."

Many Vietnam Veterans still have not talked about their experiences, but it is never too late to ask for help, Keller said.

(continued on page 10) ▶

Veteran returns to health in new home

Home-Based Primary Care

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

Army Veteran Tom Lester lived in a two-story South Omaha house divided into several apartments. At one point, said Lester's brother, Clarence Lester, about six families lived in the house, and somewhere along the line, bedbugs also took up residence.

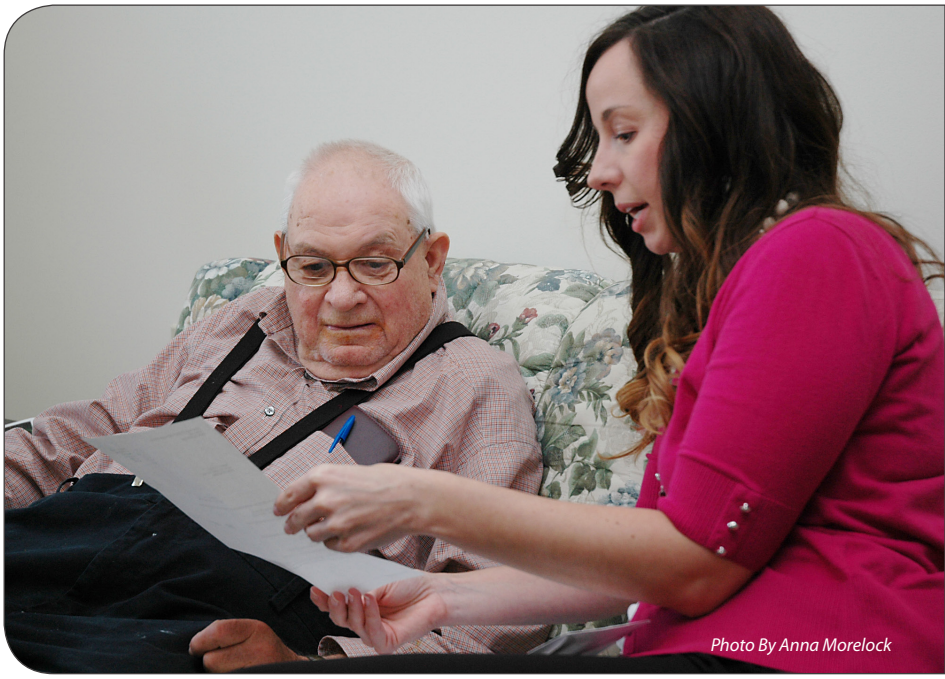
Today the house stands empty and infested, but when Lester first moved in 30 years ago, it was a home he enjoyed.

For years, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's Home-Based Primary Care Program helped keep Lester living independently in his long-time home. He walked each day, often to a nearby grocery store for breakfast with friends. His brother also stopped by to visit, change a light bulb or help with other household chores for his older brother. Lester received assistance such as a bath-aid, housekeeper and lunches from Meals-On-Wheels.

However, as the bedbug infestation in the house grew worse, visits and services that once helped keep the 86-year-old Korean War Veteran independent dwindled. HBPC staff began visiting Lester's home in protective suits and disposable clothing to avoid carrying the bugs out with them.

"But the alternative is what," asked Sandy Paasch, the HBPC social worker, "that we don't help the Veteran? It breaks my heart because you can't get the services in there. It was a bad situation, and all you want is for something good to come out of it."

Paasch came across an opportunity for Lester to move to an independent living facility with rent on an income-based scale. Her challenge was to convince



Sandy Paasch, MSSA, LCSW, a social worker in VA NWIHCS' Home-Based Primary Care Program, goes over mail with Veteran Tom Lester. The letter confirmed Lester's approval to receive Meals on Wheels in his new home where he has lived for around a month. As a part of her job, Paasch helps Veterans like Lester sign up for home-based services.

Lester he could leave his home. When she mentioned the plan to Lester's brother, Clarence told her, "good luck." He had tried the same.

> "I had some tough conversations with him. I told him, you deserve better than this. You've served our country. You've had a tough life. You deserve better, and let me help you find better."
>
> Sandy Paasch, MSSA, LCSW, Home-Based Primary Care

With help from Paasch, Lester agreed to submit an application for the last brand-new apartment available in the independent living facility. When another possible-tenant dropped out, Lester was the next on the list. He accepted the apartment and prepared to move in – without his belongings.

(continued on page 10) ▶

WHAT DOES BEING A U.S. CITIZEN *mean to you?*

"We have to be loyal to the United States, obey the laws and serve when needed. I just became a U.S. citizen Aug. 13, 2013."

Lois Kalilangwe, LPN
Licensed Practical Nurse
Bellevue CBOC

"Being a U.S. citizen means different things to a lot of people. To me it means to be as good an American that I can be. Help when and where you can and respect the morals on which our wonderful nation was formed."

Scott Freeman
Boiler Plant Operator | Grand Island CBOC

"To me being a U.S. citizen means belonging to the best country in the world. It is a privilege and a responsibility that I take seriously. I vote and hold elected officials to their promises, or at least I remind them often."

Tana Zentner, RN
Home Telehealth
Grand Island CBOC

"Doing everything required by this country to be a good citizen and part of the community for the country."

Fred Hefner
Shift Leader, Environmental Management Service | Lincoln CBOC

"It's the knowledge that I have freedom and can participate in actions in this country that I self-select."

Margaret Brock
Medical Billing Coder | Lincoln CBOC

Photo By Anna Morelock

Teen donates kits for kids to VA

Kami Willet, RN, talks to NWIHCS Director Dr. Marci Mylan about a donation made by an Iowa teen from Willet's community. As a 4-H project, Kaitlyn Tooley, from Sergeant Bluff, worked with several local organizations to create kits for children who accompany their parents to VA appointments. The bags, which were donated to Voluntary Service, contain puzzles, coloring books and other activities to keep children entertained while they wait with their parents for appointments. Bags will be distributed through clinics and taken to the community-based outpatient clinics for disbursement.

Women Veterans Forum

We want to hear from you about your care

Tuesday, Sept. 10; 6 to 8 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Christine Emler
Associate Chief of Medicine, Lincoln CBOC

Lincoln Community-Based Outpatient Clinic Auditorium
600 South 70th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

Learn about all the services available to women Veterans.
Gather with fellow women Veterans to discuss and express any concerns to VA staff.

Light Refreshments Provided

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Health Care and the Affordable Care Act

For more information on VA health care and the Affordable Care Act, visit www.va.gov/ACA.

HELLO

June 30 to July 27

Amy Arouni, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

May Asouha, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Andrea Baker, *Pharmacy*

Stephen Bedell, *Nurse Executive's Office*

Kayli Bendlin, *Pharmacy*

Amy Camacho, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Emily Carr, *Pharmacy*

Christopher Colegrove, *Environmental Management Service*

Luba Collins, *Veterans Canteen Service*

Deborah Dahlke, *Pharmacy*

Harold Delasalas, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Vijay Dewan, *Mental Health*

Penelope Forner, *Sterile Processing Service*

Sharon Galliart, *Surgery*

Jordan Greek, *Geriatric and Extended Care*

Frederick Grossman, *Surgery*

Shelly Hajny, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Oscar Hansen, *Nurse Executive's Office*

Stephanie Hartman, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Tom Hee, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Connie Huddleson, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Shinae Karasek, *Surgery*

Sean Karre, *Surgery*

Sean Kubik, *Pharmacy*

Earcel Lewis, *Surgery*

Jessica Luethje, *Pharmacy*

Stephanie Meisinger, *Pharmacy*

Christopher Moore, *Logistics*

Stephen Nissen, *Pharmacy*

April Ondrak, *Geriatric and Extended Care*

Marcie Peterson, *Imaging*

Mark Roskilly, *Environmental Management Service*

Jennifer Rother, *Pharmacy*

Deborah Russell, *Nurse Executive's Office*

John Russell, *Mental Health*

Eric Shiner, *Mental Health*

Jill Simonsen, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Sheila Turek, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Jue Wang, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Stanley Wilder, *Environmental Management Service*

Angelo Zieno, *Mental Health*

GOODBYE

June 30 to July 27

Christina Alkire, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Daniel Anderson, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Sarah Anderson, *Surgery*

Kathryn Bauer, *Pharmacy*

Alia Creason, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Harold Delasalas, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Christine DeMasi, *Nutrition*

Maxeen King, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Jenna Mann, *Pharmacy*

Kate O'Dell, *Director's Office*

Edward O'Leary, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Eric Peters, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Frederick Petty, *Mental Health*

Thomas Price, *Biomedical Engineering*

Brianna Renninger, *Business Office*

Jaimie Scott, *Finance*

Amy Turner, *Mental Health*

Elizabeth Welch, *Pharmacy*

Kathleen Wallace, *Pharmacy*

RETIRING

June 30 to July 27

John Baller, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Michael Crawford, *Engineering*

Jane Degner, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Daniel Mathers, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

Satish Mediratta, *Primary Care and Specialty Medicine*

▶ *Home-Based Care continued from page 8*

Lester was unable to take his furniture, or even his Bible, out of his old home. At a team meeting, HBPC staff took up the cause and came up with a couch, table, chairs, clothing and food for Lester to take to his new home. His brother donated a television and a rocking chair. All Lester brought to his new home was a small sealed plastic tub containing his important documents.

Clarence said he was amazed at the donations from the HBPC staff and how they got Lester settled into his new home. With health issues of his own, Clarence now only has one free day a week to visit Lester and can't do many of the chores he used to help his brother with. Knowing Lester is taken care of is a huge relief, he said.

Since his move, Lester's health has improved and he's met many new friends.

"They got everything," Lester said of his new home. "They sing and play the piano; they do exercise."

Paasch said she can see how happy he is in his new home.

"He went from just living to thriving," she said.

▶ *Vietnam Veterans continued from page 7*

"We appreciate what you did and how you served our country," Keller said. "We really want to be there to serve you now. That's one of the reasons, I could have retired five, 10 years ago, but I like to stick around because I've had so much experience. I want to use it now."

To learn more about PTSD treatment, including stories from Veterans about how it helped them turn their lives around, visit the National Center for PTSD at www.ptsd.va.gov.

Kris Kintzle, from Logistics in Omaha, collects donations and loads them into barrels to be picked up by the food bank.

feds **feed** families

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

This year VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System kicked off its first organized effort for the national Feds Feed Families food drive. A champion at each site picked up donations and coordinated with local food banks to accept food. While any non-perishable item was accepted, a new theme each week encouraged employees to donate items such as Nebraska foods, canned fruit, peanut butter and jelly or the makings for an Italian meal. The goal was to raise 3.5 pounds of food per person, which equaled 7,370 pounds, over the course of the three-month long effort. Nationwide, VA's goal was to collect 450,000 pounds of food.

VA NWIHCS donated its collected food items to the following organizations:

VA Food Pantry and the Food Bank for the Heartland, Omaha and Bellevue

Lincoln Food Bank

Food Bank for the Heartland, Grand Island

Phelps Community Pantry Center, Holdrege

Bright Horizons Resources for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Norfolk

Shenandoah Community Pantry

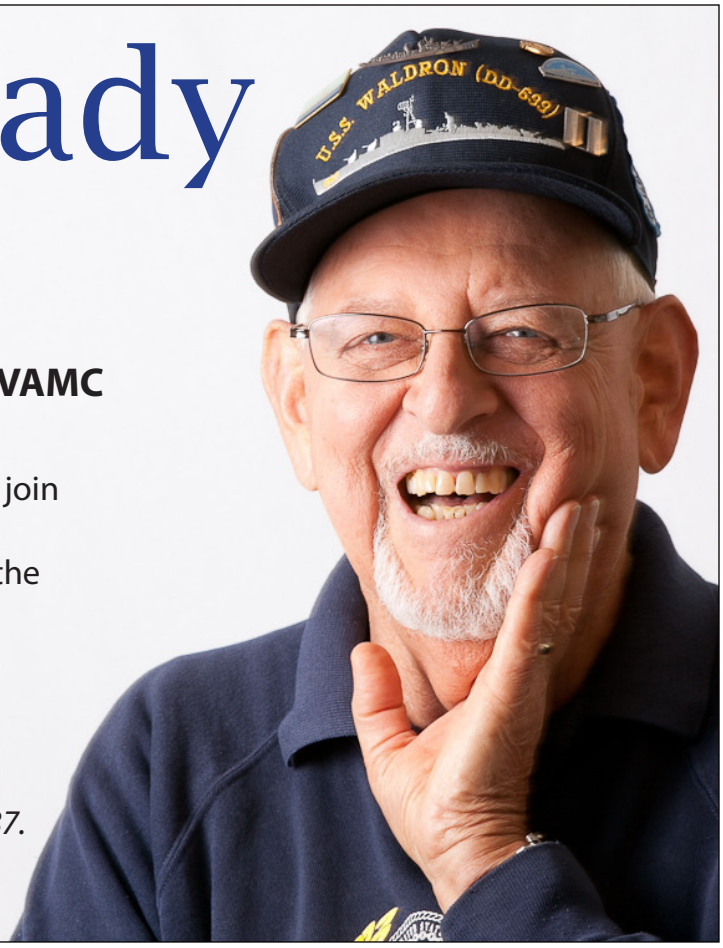
The Connection, North Platte

EVENTS what's going on?

Sept. 2	**Labor Day (Federal Holiday)**
Sept. 4	**Employee Patient-Centered Care Retreat, Grand Island** **Veteran Food Pantry, Omaha** **Farmers Market, Lincoln** **Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 5	**Employee Patient-Centered Care Retreat, Omaha** **Community Resource and Referral Center and Victory Apartments Grand Opening, Omaha**
Sept. 6	**Mental Health Summit, Lincoln**
Sept. 9	**Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 10	**Women Veterans Forum, Lincoln** **Employee Patient-Centered Care Retreat, Omaha**
Sept. 10-14	**National Veterans TEE Tournament, Iowa City, Iowa**
Sept. 11	**Patriot Day** **Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 12	**Employee Patient-Centered Care Retreat, Grand Island**
Sept. 16	**Employee Patient-Centered Care Retreat, Omaha** **Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 18	**VA Food Pantry, Omaha** **Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 20	**National POW/MIA Recognition Day** **VA Coffee House, Lincoln**
Sept. 22	**Autumn Begins**
Sept. 23	**Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 25	**VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln** **Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**
Sept. 30	**Exercise Class for Veterans, Omaha**

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

Are you ready to move?



Exercise Class for Veterans open at Omaha VAMC

What you need to know:

- Talk to your Primary Care Provider for permission to join
- Drop in to class from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays in the Education Conference Room at the Omaha VAMC
- Wear comfortable clothes and participate in low- to moderate-impact exercises
- Improve your health and well-being

For more information, contact Kelli Stott at 402-995-4987.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

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www.nebraska.va.gov