

Cycling Wall to Wall for Veterans

By Paula L. Pedene, APR

As an NFL defensive lineman, Jeremy Staat knew how to block 'em and move on. He began his football career at Arizona State University as a Sun Devil and was friends with Pat Tillman. They both went on to play professional football. For Jeremy, it was with Pittsburgh, Seattle, St. Louis and Oakland. For Tillman it was the Arizona Cardinals, until 9/11. The next year Tillman gave up his football career to enlist in the Army, with Staat wanting to join him. Tillman told Staat he couldn't as he was only six games away from his NFL retirement and to do so just wasn't a wise decision. Staat listened and the two agreed to hook up in the service later on. Unfortunately for Staat, that dream never came to pass.

"I was shocked when I heard he was killed," said Staat. "Even though I was going to retire from the NFL, I kept thinking Pat would want me to finish my schooling first. So I did. I went back to ASU and obtained my degree in liberal studies online."

With the degree and the NFL under his belt, he did something else. At the age of 29, the maximum enlistment age, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps as an Infantry Marine Gunner, to keep his promise to Tillman. During his four years he was deployed to Hadetha, Iraq. When he came home



USMC Veteran Jeremy Staat visits with USMC Veteran and CLC Resident Cecil Vallejo

to Bakersfield, Calif. as an Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veteran, he helped raise funds for their local "Wall of Valor."

"The wall houses the names of 1,012 Veterans from Kern County who have died from World War I to the present. For me, I see their faces, not just a name. It made me think what can I do to bring all of our Veterans together as Americans?"

The Valor Wall campaign was successful and when that ended Staat took up a new four-fold cause: raising awareness to help prevent suicide amongst Veterans, creating Veterans education centers on all college

campuses, having a more efficient VA system and helping to stamp out childhood obesity.

"I talked to my friends and family and we thought if we could cycle across the country, we can do a good job of raising awareness to our cause."

Staat set out with fellow OIF Veteran Wesley Barrientos, a three time Purple Heart recipient and double amputee. They created the Jeremy Staat Foundation, devised the Wall to Wall Cross Country Cycle Ride and are cycling cross country—one with his legs the other

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with his hands—to make an impact. The cycling journey began Feb. 19 in Bakersfield and will move across the United States until they reach Washington, D.C. on Memorial Day.

Along the way, they want to stir enough emotion to establish college education centers for our Veterans, to reduce the numbers of Veterans who commit suicide, to create a more efficient VA system and to instill that sense of servitude to the youth of today. And they’re making time to visit VA hospitals, schools and others to make their message resonate.

During their recent visit to the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS) they spent hours visiting with patients, talking to a recently injured OIF Veteran and making rounds with the center’s new director, Sharon Helman.

“When I hooked up with them I thought this is so nice for them to come and visit, and then when I heard

their stories, my heart just went out to them,” she said.

She asked the two how their VA health care was and both were complimentary, but concerned about some of the waits and delays for their benefits. In fact, Barrientos was unable to get new valves on his prosthetic legs prior to the journey. A call to the PVAHCS prosthetics and orthotics lab fixed that. Both Tony Flanagan and Scott Alvis squeezed him in between four other patients, on the spot making the needed repairs.

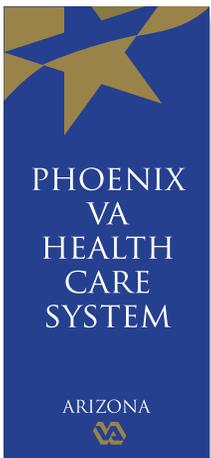
“It is an honor to serve our nation’s Veterans and today was no different for the Phoenix VA. Our staff will do anything they can for the men and women who have worn the uniform,” Helman added.

When Staat and Barrientos join their fellow Veterans on Memorial Day, they’ll be in good hands. Two of their Vietnam colleagues have given up their seats at the Tomb of the

Unknown Soldier for them to lay the wreath that day.

“It’s the 25th anniversary of Rolling Thunder, the big motorcycle rally created by Vietnam Veterans to remind us that ‘Freedom isn’t free.’ When I think of the sacrifices and humiliation our Vietnam Veterans had to endure when they returned to our country, all I want to do is rally all our Veterans, to bring them together in a spirit of unity, and remind them it’s all about service over self. Our Veterans don’t start the wars, they just defend our country,” says Staat.

You can watch their Wall to Wall Cross Country Cycle Ride on their Web site at www.walltowallbicycleride.com and follow them on Twitter @walltowallride and find them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/walltowallcrosscountrybicycleride>. ■



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VA HEALTH CARE | Defining **EXCELLENCE** in the 21st Century

New PVAHCS Director Sharon Helman Shares Her Leadership Vision: “Veterans Are Our Focus”

By Paula L. Pedene, APR

When a Veteran asked Helman what she was doing for herself, she replied, “I’m a mother of five, wife to a disabled Veteran, and they keep me busy.” But the Veteran persisted, “No, I didn’t ask you what you were doing for them, I asked you what you were doing for *you*.”

That question made her think and she took it to heart. What was she doing for herself? After all as a hospital director, mother and wife, what time was left? So it was after that game of basketball where a disabled Veteran in a wheelchair could beat her, she started doing something that would help her improve her health. She decided to take up running and she never looked back.

“I started out with just one mile, and then I worked up to a few and then I thought, I wonder if I could do a marathon?” She did, and she’s been competing in marathons ever since. Her most recent 26.2 mile run was as entry No. 261 in the P.F. Chang’s Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon. Helman says that running gives her time to think, clear her head and it allows her to enjoy some of her favorite treats like Snickers and Diet Coke.

Her five children, Serena, Courtney, Austin, Larissah and Kiersten, have dubbed her “Marathon Mom,” and they celebrate with her each time she completes a race and brings home her medal. She says, she’s a slow runner and tends to end up in the back 40 of a race field, but that’s OK because for her it’s about completing the race and doing something for herself to keep her promise to a Veteran.

She may be a slow and steady runner, but when you look at her VA career the slow and steady ends. She’s been on a fast track for more than 20 years. She entered the system in June 1990 as a GS-4 Program Specialist. She admired her director Gary Rossio at the VA San Diego Health Care System and decided then, that would be the job to shoot for. She earned her college degree



Sharon Helman, MBA, Medical Center Director

and then her masters while raising her children. Helman landed her first VA leadership role in Roseburg, Ore., as associate director in March 2005. From there, she worked her way up from lower complexity level hospitals to one of the most complex VA hospitals in the country, the Hines VA Hospital in Chicago.

At Hines her responsibilities were about as huge as the campus, which spans 142 acres. She was in charge of the medical center, the blind rehab center, the spinal cord injury center, and other VA support services. In just two short years, she took the Hines facility from a deficit of \$14 million to a balanced budget, and along the way, improved both patient and staff satisfaction scores through her empowering leadership style.

“Veterans are why we are here. I live and breathe this mission. Each day, I renew my promise to take care of our Veterans and to give them the best care we can.”

The cold weather and the high cost of living motivated her to take a leap for the job as director at the Phoenix VA Health Care System. She is the first female director since PVAHCS opened its doors in 1951 and one of 44 female directors nationwide.

In her first day on the job in Phoenix, Feb. 27, she held two meetings with supervisors to share her leadership

vision for the future. “I base my decisions on three things. First, is it good for the Veteran, second, is it good for the staff, and third, is it good for the family: mine and our VA family. If we can answer yes, then I know that this is the best thing we can be doing.”

In her second day on the job, Feb. 28, she held three meetings with more than 500 attendees. First she acknowledged the VA employees who were Veterans and thanked them for their service. Then she reminded everyone that it is “By the grace of God that our Veterans came back after their service to our country. Since they were willing to take a bullet for us, for our freedom, it is now our duty to give them the best care we can.”

She also shared other beliefs... “This is about how we care for our Veterans like we care for our own family.”

“I am your team; we are all in this together.”

“What I expect of you, I expect of myself.”

“I want you all taking risks, because when we do we succeed as a team, and if we fail, we fail as a team, since we are all taking these risks together.”

“There are solutions to every problem.”

Helman is excited to be a part of the Phoenix VA team, where she knows

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Move Program Success Story

By Jennifer Punchios

The *MOVE* Program is designed to help Veterans both lose weight and maintain healthy eating habits, but it is not without hard work and dedication that you get the results that can change lives. The program and its support system not only educate about healthy living, change the way we look and think about food. There have been many success stories from the *MOVE* Program, one particular story is that of former Marine John Shartel. His amazing weight loss journey began in January 2009 when his doctor referred him to Ashely Bremer. John struggled with his weight loss in the beginning, and only saw minor changes. John has overcome many obstacles during this time, one major bump in his long road to success was when he injured his knee and needed surgery. Due to his unhealthy weight John's doctor could



John and Mary Shartel

not do the surgery. This is when Ashely Bremer sat John down and encouraged him to make a change. It was at this point that John took charge and made a choice, using Ashely's guidance and helpful tips John began eating better and making healthier decisions.

As time went on John began to notice the positive changes, and his

wife Mary also a Veteran, started following the advice and guidelines the *MOVE* Program had to offer as well. John and his wife took what they had learned and made it work for them. Putting their own twist on getting healthy together. When dining out instead of ordering two meals, they split one and also increased their fruit and vegetable servings. As a team effort John and his wife Mary were using better portion control and making better snack food decisions. One creative way John began exercising was trips to the grocery store in which he could use the time while shopping to also get his walking in at his own pace, another was swimming. By February 2011 John had lost enough weight that his doctor determined surgery was no longer needed. As of now John has lost 90 pounds and is continuing to take a healthier approach to eating and in life. ■

Questions and Answers about Fish and Omega-3 Fats

from the American Institute for Cancer Research

Scientists are finding many potential health benefits from omega-3 fats in cold-water fish like salmon, rainbow trout, white albacore tuna and sardines. Some fish, notably salmon and white tuna, may contain mercury and toxins called PCBs (light tuna contains less mercury). However, most experts believe that by limiting fish to two 3-ounce servings per week and removing skin and visible fat, the health benefits of eating these fish outweigh the hazards from pollutants. Women who may become or are pregnant, or who are nursing, as well as young children, should avoid those fish with highest mercury content: king mackerel, tilefish, shark and swordfish, but eat other kinds.

Q: Does the omega-3 fat in fish lower blood cholesterol?

A: Omega-3 fat, whether from fish or supplements, does not directly reduce blood cholesterol. However, fish does

provide many heart health benefits. Substituting healthfully prepared fish – not fish that is battered or deep fried – for meat or cheese may help drop your blood cholesterol. The cholesterol lowering would be due to the drop in saturated fat, not to the fish itself. You would also lower saturated fat consumption and thus blood cholesterol, by substituting a low fat bean dish for fatty meat. Fish especially high in omega-3 fat, such as salmon and rainbow trout, seems to lower risk of heart disease through a variety of mechanisms. Omega-3 fat may help keep heart rhythm normal, decrease inflammation, reduce plaque and clot formation in blood vessels, lower blood triglycerides and slightly reduce blood pressure.

Q: Do eggs that are high in omega-3 fat provide the same healthy fat found in fish?

A: Egg producers can alter the type of fat found in their eggs by changing the type of fat that their chickens are fed. Several brands of eggs are available from hens fed a diet that includes ground flaxseed, a source of omega-3 fat. Amounts vary between producers, but compared to a traditional egg that has essentially no omega-3 fat, these may each have from 200 to 400 milligrams (mg) of omega-3 fat. As a reference, the omega-3 content of a three-ounce portion of fish considered high in omega-3 fat (namely trout, sea bass and sockeye salmon) can range from 800 to over 1000 mg. Two eggs that together provide the upper range of omega-3 content would be roughly the equivalent of one serving of these fish. A cautionary note to those sensitive to cholesterol: Two eggs contain from 370 to 450 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol – more than is recommended for a whole day. ■

Our Patients Tell Us...

Feb. 29, 2012

Dear Stephanie...

Re: Patient Bill Brandel

My thanks for your follow-up call to Bill. THANKS TO YOU, hospice placement for Bill has been initiated.

Bill was admitted into the VA Hospital on 2/21 with a blood clot in his right leg. In the midst of debate over the best course of action, Betty Roger's associate – Jamie – tracked us to the ER department and helped initiate the hospice paperwork. By the next day,

she'd contacted the hospice affiliate associated with our health care facility at Royal Oaks – Highway Christian Hospice-and faxed Dr. Cooper's order to them.

Today, the HCH Medical Director and his admissions RN visited and certified Bill. He will remain home under the care of a 'retired' hospice RN-his wife, ha!

I believe we would still be in "limbo" if you hadn't taken the time to meet with us on Feb. 9 and then on Feb.

27, taken the initiative to follow-up with Dr. Cooper/staff. We are deeply grateful. The lord was watching over us. You were the RIGHT gal in the RIGHT place at the RIGHT time.

Blessings to you and to all those entrusted to your care.

Sincerely,

Shirley Brandel

bc: Stephanie's supervisor "She's one in a million!" ■

PR PROVIDERS

Public Affairs Officer Paula L. Pedene APR often has to garner media assistance from staff for interviews and other information on a short turnaround basis for media queries. When staff assists our VA with media and other PR requests, Pedene recognizes them as PR Providers. This helps us provide our four-hour turnaround for media queries, and helps to support other special needs for public relations assistance. PR Providers earn recognition in this column, and they receive a special token of appreciation for their PR efforts.

- ◆ Our thanks to Dr. Joel Cooper for the photo of Mr. Inwalle that we used in the Jan/Feb edition of the Desert Sun. Dr. Cooper has been sending us some great photos and story ideas from the North West VA Health Care Clinic and we thank him for assisting us in our PR efforts. We apologize though for missing a photo of the clinic in the last issue.
- ◆ Our thanks to Caroline Goodman and Sheila Woodroffe, dietitians, for taking the mobile Healthy Kitchen to Channel 12 for j12How to get your plate in shape.
- ◆ Our thanks to Darryl Simmons for arriving at the VA at 4 a.m. to prepare the mobile kitchen and assisting the registered dietitians at Channel 12.
- ◆ Our thanks to Dr. Leslie Telfer for her PTSD Treatment Awareness efforts March 12 on KTVK at 5 p.m., March 12 on KPNX at 6 p.m., and March 13 on KTVK at 8 a.m.
- ◆ Our thanks to Director Helman for your interview with the Arizona Republic.
- ◆ Our thanks to Dr. Darren Deering, Randy Koontz, Scott Neibauer and Mary Monet for the Arizona Republic story about the federal restrictions on medical marijuana.
- ◆ Our thanks to Robert Kish for the KPHO Pay It Forward submission.
- ◆ Our thanks to the National Recreation Events Committee for their efforts during the Art Show and to Eva Gergely in particular for the bios for the participants at the Winter Sports Clinic.



Paula L. Pedene, APR, with a Silver Anvil Award presented by the Public Relations Society of America

We thank you all for being PR Providers!

Veterans History Project

By Larry Conway

The Veteran we interviewed in June 2011 was at “popcorn corner” while here for an appointment. After I described the Veterans History Project to him, and how his story could be shared with his family and generations to come, as it would be in the Library of Congress, he was eager to share it with us.

Jerry was an 18-year-old in the U.S. Army in Vietnam serving behind enemy lines as a - Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Ranger. His interview lasted three hours. What made it a standout was the passion he expressed about his service and his feeling of brotherhood for fellow service men and women. He told us he had never shared some of his story with anyone, even his family, and how proud he was that his story will now be preserved for generations to come. He also expressed how relieved he was that *someone* was finally interested and listening to his experiences. Jerry has now become an active part of the Veterans History Project.

Jerry has shared his interview experience with others of his platoon when he was in Vietnam, who now live in other areas of the U.S. The Veterans History Project in those states have now captured their stories. Had we not approached this Veteran that day stories about him and his brothers in arms may never have been chronicled for history! Jerry’s own story is now one of the 80,000 stories in the archives of the Library of Congress. ■

Focus, continued from page 3

much work lies ahead.

“I know there is a parking problem, and I know we’ve had issues with our fee bases care, and I know that we’re growing like crazy—we’ve added 20,000 new Veterans to our facility in just the last two years, but I’m excited to see what we can do to work on this together.

There is much to look forward to. Within her first 90 days she’ll visit at least four community clinics; she’ll conduct a Veterans Service Organization and congressional

staff briefing; she’ll handle two congressional visits; she’ll celebrate her son’s 12th birthday; she plans on writing heartwarming weekly messages to share her life with staff; she’ll visit areas of the hospital and meet with patients, and the list goes on.

Perhaps the best way to summarize her initial town hall meetings is to leave us with the thoughts she used in closing at each of her presentations to staff.

“The Veterans are why we are here. I live and breathe this mission. The Veterans are always the focus.” ■

Saying Farewell to Karma

By Bridgette Henness and Julie Effron, CRT

Stan Parker and his very well-trained Seeing Eye dog Karma came to live at our VA in 2009.

His family donated his 13-year-old Karma to us when he passed away.

Little did she know it, but Karma pioneered dog therapy at PVAHCS and blazed the way for the VA wide Cultural Transformation Project. The Community Living Center had an active pet committee that saw to her care and well-being. I heard her favorite treat was chicken.

Being donated to us changed her status from service dog, that and helps a single person, to facility dog that lives in and helps an entire facility. Last year on July 5 Channel 10 did a story on her.

The CLC dining room has a wonderful collage of Karma. She is the only dog I have seen with her own badge. She walked in, sat down, and posed for her picture like a real trooper: she didn’t even let the flash bother her.

Karma placed her paw prints upon the lives of the VA with love. There was a hospice patient and his family that she made a large impact on. After his death, his spouse came back just to say thank you and goodbye to Karma.

She would help bring withdrawn patients out of their shells. When recreation therapists Julie Effron and Brenda Walker brought her around



visiting with patients she was so well-behaved that she didn’t need a leash. Effron was one of her favorite friends during day shift and Ann Segura, RN at night. She would do a little dance with her stuffed monkey when she saw them.

Because her age and hip dysplasia made it hard for her to get up and down her mat was placed outside of a patient’s room and she would watch the hallways or sleep under the mirror in his room. He loved having the company.

Karma also had her own corner of the Day Room with access to the courtyard where she could let herself in and out. When she wanted her own special quiet time she would go to CLC staff Karen Farina’s office where she also had a corner of an office.

Karma celebrated her birthday Nov. 2 and died on March 2 of this year. ■



Construction Update

By Demarques Potter

The Phoenix VA community has been through a lot in the past few months and more excitement is yet to come. Several construction projects are currently underway that will greatly improve Veteran care and increase the space. These investments help us meet increasing patient demands, accommodate new equipment and support numerous initiatives and directives from the Department of Veteran Affairs. We should all be proud of these activities as this is the realization of hard work and sacrifice by the entire Phoenix VA community.

Projects currently on-going:

- **Plumbing Phase 7 and OR repairs:** This project is currently ongoing, taking place in D-tower and the Operating Room Suites of the main hospital.
- **Rehabilitation Building:** This new two-story, 28,000 square foot facility is to be located adjacent to D-wing of the main hospital. This is

the big project you see on the south side of the ACC as you walk the hallway and look out the windows. It will house rehabilitation services. Project is currently ongoing.

- **Replace Flooring:** Project consists of flooring, wainscot and cove base replacement in hallways of Building 1 on several floors. Project will require intermittent phasing/restricted access to various floors. Project is currently ongoing.
- **New Mental Health Building:** This new three-story, 41,000 square feet facility is adjacent to the main hospital where Building 4 used to be. It will house the residential treatment program and other mental health functions. Demolition is ongoing and construction is expected to begin early this summer.

Again, we appreciate everyone's understanding and continued support throughout these continuing changes. We are proud to have and will continue to serve our nation's Veterans and their families. ■

Quality Expo 2012 A Blueprint for Change May 22 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

The 15th annual Quality Expo, A Blueprint for Change, is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesday, May 22 in the ACC conference rooms. This event recognizes and celebrates the achievement of teams and staff as we continuously improve our facility. All employees are encouraged to submit storyboards showcasing improvements, innovations, and best practices.

Submit your entry on the Web page, Quality Management. Storyboards and supplies are available from Dianne Bruns at Quality Management in Building 27.

Last year's winning presentations were:

- Improving the Dining Experience in the CLC.
- EOC Rounds System.
- Reducing Flash Sterilization in the Operating Room.

Be the next team to enter and win! You may contact members of the Quality Expo Task Force for more information: Dianne Bruns, ext. 6968; Becky Munoz, ext. 7731; Josephine La Londe, ext. 7544; Leilanee Lobres, ext. 6700; or Leah Hopper, ext. 2870. ■

Thunderbird Staff Applauds Officer Cedric Marks

We are writing to you on behalf of all Thunderbird VA Health Care Clinic staff members, requesting Officer Cedric Marks receive special recognition for his outstanding work ethic, professionalism and attentiveness to the security of each individual while assigned to this clinic. We are aware that a particular police officer cannot be designated to the Thunderbird VAHCC with the need to rotate on a quarterly basis. We would like to request Officer Marks' protocol be shared to ensure that all officers who follow him are fully aware of the security requirement of a CBOC such as:

- Introducing self and becoming familiar with all staff members of the clinic.
- Participating in clinic meetings; convey engagement in safety and security of all staff members.
- Making routine rounds throughout the clinic multiple times per day.
- Making routine rounds outside the clinic, on property and parking lot multiple times per day.

At the last staff meeting, Dr. Sam Foote provided accolades as to the integrity, attentiveness and sincerity that Officer Marks brought to this clinic. He not only fulfilled an assigned duty, but also completed assessments

to improve security at this clinic. As Dr. Foote acknowledged Officer Marks, staff members joined in the conversation stating that he was the best police officer since the departure of Officer Donald Barnes. The following comments are written testimonies from Dr. Zoe Forester, psychiatrist and Jennifer Retterer, PharmD which reflect the sentiments of the clinic staff.

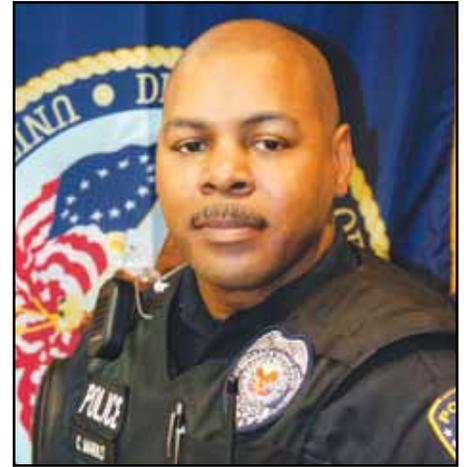
"We need Officer Marks. It's not just we need an officer (which we do), but Officer Marks is an integral part of the Thunderbird CBOC treatment. Our Veteran patients deserve continuity. Seeing "a" provider is not the same the same sanctity of respecting continuity. Preserving continuity should be the highest priority.

Please reconsider and assign Officer Marks to Thunderbird CBOC on a permanent basis.

*Respectfully,
Dr. Forester*



I have worked for the PVAHCS for about 13 years and I would like to take a moment to let you know that Officer Marks is an outstanding professional. I would like to express my gratitude to have worked with Officer Marks



Cedric Marks

and my desire for his speedy return to Thunderbird clinic.

He is the first officer since Officer Barnes to really review the security and safety needs of Thunderbird Clinic. Because of his superior interpersonal skills, he took the time to meet each person at Thunderbird clinic and make them feel that he was paying attention to the security and safety for each person as an individual. Officer Marks is truly an asset to the PVAHCS police department and was an integral part of the Thunderbird clinic team during his assignment here.

*Jennifer Retterer,
Thunderbird clinic pharmacist*

Valuable VAEA Memberships Now Available

By Michelle Roberts

Membership in the VA Employees' Association (VAEA) is open to all VA employees of this facility, Veterans, Canteen Service employees, volunteers, and other associates. Our aim is to cultivate friendly relationships among, and promote

the welfare of, our members by aiding and encouraging general participation in social and related activities and group economic opportunities.

Cost of VAEA membership is only \$5 per calendar year, and once you join you will be given a mini-packet of discount opportunities and events.

Many discounts and special offers are available to the VAEA through its membership in ESM, Employee Network and the Perks Card. You will also be added to an Outlook e-mail group that will notify you of any new discounts. Call (602) 222-6442 with questions. ■

Get to Know our NW Clinic Exercisers

By Christine L. Johnston-Klauschie,
Psy.D., LISAC Psychologist

I wanted to share with you the awesome wellness efforts of our Northwest Clinic staff.

When the VA Employee Wellness Program began to advertise the “In It to Win It” weight-loss challenge I sent out an informal inquiry to our clinic employees to identify who would be interested in an after-work exercise class at our clinic. I received an enthusiastic “yes!” from more than a dozen NW clinic staff; however, differing schedules and family obligations made it difficult for many to participate. Additionally, many are already participating in exercise programs on their own. A few NW Clinic employees decided to join me as a group and take on the challenge. This group of NW Clinic employees includes Jacqueline Smith, LPN; Sota Keo, Nurse Practitioner; Deborah Tucker, LPN; and Sherry Whitener, Social Worker.

Jan. 9 was our start date to get prepped for the challenge which officially opened Jan. 23. The exercise regimen began with a 30-minute high intensity core cardiovascular program Monday through Thursday for the first two weeks. The group then graduated to a 45-minute high intensity core cardiovascular exercise two days per week and a 45-minute Zumba Cardio and Toning group exercise the other two days per week.

This group, with the hope of other NW Clinic employees joining us, will continue to participate in the group exercise Monday through Thursday.

We are also hoping there will be some upcoming challenges, such as a “challenge” between CBOC’s or other VA teams.

Our participants share their reflections on this wellness challenge.

How long have you worked for the VA?

LPN Jackie Smith: July 12 will be 20 yrs that I’ve worked for the VA.



Standing (LtoR) Christine Johnston-Klauschie, Ph.D., Sota Keo, NP/RN, Sherry Whitener, Social Worker, and Dorthea Williams, RN, Seated (LtoR) Jacqueline Smith, LPN and Deborah Tucker, LPN

DNP Sota Keo: Six plus years

LPN Deborah Tucker: Eight months

What made you join the exercise group class at the Northwest Clinic?

LPN Jackie: My doctor gave me three months to get healthy or start taking medications. The class came just in time. I didn’t know what to do and two weeks later there was a class for me.

DNP Keo: To reduce stress at work.

LPN Deborah: Co-worker.

You spend a good portion of your work day on your feet running around. How do you get motivated to exercise after work?

LPN Jackie: I get motivated because my co-workers tell me, “Don’t forget the class. I’ll see you in class,” and we have a great time working out. It is very fun to be in this class.

DNP Keo: To get my mind off stress, and change my mood into a normal communication.

LPN Deborah: My co-workers in the exercise group.

How have you benefitted participating in the group exercise class?

LPN Jackie: I have lost 10 lbs. now and will be able to go to my

doctor knowing that I have done what she asked.

DNP Keo: Better mood, and able to eat, and sleep better at night.

LPN Deborah: Friends at work, fun, and oh yea, weight loss.

What is your next wellness plan goal?

LPN Jackie: Hoping that we still have the class, but if not will try to walk and do the workout at home on my X-Box, which my kids and husband gave for me for Christmas to work out with an X-Box coach.

DNP Keo: Socialize more, not working all the time.

LPN Deborah: Heart-healthy fitness.

What would you tell your co-workers, friends, or family to motivate them to participate in healthy physical activities similar to what you have doing?

LPN Jackie: I would let them know that you would feel better afterward. You would have more energy and lose weight.

DNP Keo: It is better for me to participate in a group exercise because I have no excuse when I know that my group is waiting for me to join them.

LPN Deborah: Better to do exercise after work in the facility, so you do not have to leave work and then forget to exercise. Plus it builds a friendship with co-workers. ■

HIGHLIGHTS

Around the Medical Center

By Paula L. Pedene, APR, Public Affairs Officer

- Thanks to **Amy Frazier** who shared this story: I just saw a patient in clinic for the first time, a man in his 60s living at the fountains. It was a very clean, brief interview with medicines to be refilled. Towards the end I asked him if he ever gets sad, he said yes because he doesn't get to talk to his sister. (He had reported earlier no contact with family since the 1970s and he believes his father dead). The patient said he was originally from Detroit. Anyway, I called information in the Detroit area and was able to get in touch with his family!!! He hopped onto the speaker phone and spoke with his sister in law – she said that the family had been trying to reach him for years – through the Internet. And that his father was still alive!! Amy Frazier thank you for making a difference.
- On Sunday, February 5, residents in the Community Living Center were treated to a Super Bowl party. **Anne Segura, a RN on CLC-1** brought in non-alcoholic beer and assorted snack food. Even Tanah, Gary Becker's service dog was in attendance. This is the second Superbowl party that was held. The Veterans were rooting for their favorite teams and generally enjoying the day. The Giants defeated the Patriots 21–17 in Indianapolis, Indiana.
- “This was the experience of a lifetime. But I would not repeat it for any amount of money,” is how **Veteran Boris Innocenti** closes his brief memoir. Born April 14, 1924,



Barry Becker and Comrades enjoying Super Bowl Party

Innocenti was drafted into the Army in March 1943. He was a freshman in college but did not qualify for deferment. Fluent in Italian, he was stationed outside Paris in 1944. Towards the end of the war, in 1945, Innocenti assisted in mapping the American units in Germany. He crossed the Atlantic home to the United States a Tech 5 Corporal, the highest attainable corporal rank, during the worst sea storm in 40 years.

Upon his return to Arizona he married his sweetheart Rose, to whom he was married for 50 years until her

death. Together they raised two daughters and two sons. To celebrate his 87th birthday, his daughter, who is in her 60's, took him bird-watching in rural Arizona.



Boris Innocenti

His primary hobby for many years was scuba diving and he has self-published a DVD on the topic. He built and maintained many aquariums in addition to running a dive shop and teaching scuba classes. He is an avid reader, particularly on his favorite subject, astrophysics in which he holds a Master's degree. He also enjoys photography and creating things in his home machine shop. A true Renaissance man, a soldier and a scholar, Boris Innocenti, is a rare treasure indeed.

Innocenti will be the featured speaker at the upcoming **Literature and Medicine Reading Group**. This Group meets monthly for six months to read and discuss stories that renew the heart and soul of health care. The *Literature & Medicine* discussions assist health care professionals to improve their communication and interpersonal skills while increasing their cultural awareness, empathy for patients, and job satisfaction.

- Congratulations to **Dr. Juraj Koska**, Phoenix VA Research Health Scientist, for being selected as the 2012 American Diabetes Association Cure Award Recipient. According to Suzanne Miller, ADA Director Program Implementation & Outreach, the award was presented at the Radisson Hotel March 27.
- Thanks to **Laura Winter**, we had lovely green and white bows around the Emergency Department entrance and our front gate in time for St. Patrick's Day. Winter also created this lovely bulletin board in the ED to help celebrate Arizona's Centennial.



- **Michael Schnorr** PA-C, LTJG (Ret), Purple Heart, VA Locum Tenens Program recently published a book about his ancestors in the French and Indian War – It’s historical fiction novel, *Thunder, Lightning and Pillars of Smoke* at <http://www.tatepublishing.com/bookstore/book.php?w=978-1-61777-944-2>
- This was the first “American” war and the book deals with some issues common today, such as deployment, family, anxiety, and PTSD. Some of it relates to combat experience. Schnorr says, “It was a different war and a different time, but it directly related to the American Revolution. It is also the war in which the US Army Rangers trace their direct line – Rogers Rangers.”
- The National Nurse Executive Council Workforce Development Subcommittee “Healthy Workforce Environment” (HWE) is continuing our efforts to promote self-health and wellness with our staff. Our newest focus is an enhanced emphasis on Safe Patient Handling (SPH), specifically, the UNIT PEER LEADER (UPL), with a “Unit Peer Leader of the Month Campaign 2012”. The goal of this campaign is to recognize the individuals that help sustain the theme of self health/preventing self injury to staff by providing education on the unit level. These UPLs are a crucial component of the Safe Patient Handling National Initiative! Let’s

recognize their efforts and dedication of decreasing work injuries related to repositioning and lifting patients.

We wish to honor our first UPL of the Month, Sheila Girard, NA, 2C. Although our SPH Program didn’t start until 2008, Sheila has been an enthusiastic advocate since attending National Conference in 2006. She completes Safety Huddles and has submitted all monthly Walk-Through documentation since July 2011. Sheila serves as expert SPH equipment resource throughout the facility, providing assistance to peers as needed on other units. She also understands that transferring our Veteran’s while providing excellent care can be uncomfortable, especially for those in pain. Just try to move a patient manually with Sheila around. You’ll hear her say, “That’s not the way we transfer our patients on 2C!” Her dedication to safety for staff, our families and patients is commendable.

Sheila’s Nurse Manger, Jill Friend, adds: “We are proud to have Sheila as a part of 2c and the VA organization she makes all the difference in the care that we deliver to the patients here. I am forever grateful to those dedicated individuals like Sheila that hold herself to a standard above and therefore setting a fantastic role model example for other staff to follow.” Thank you Sheila for all your dedication and hard work. ■

Santos is New Chief for the Veterans Canteen Service

By Kimberly Pardieu

The Phoenix VA Health Care System welcomes Fabian Santos as Chief of Veterans Canteen Service. Santos, who began his new position in February, brings food service experience from both the private and public sectors to the VA table. Although he holds a degree in Speech Communication Disorders from Saint Louis University, interestingly enough, Santos said that he has always enjoyed the food industry and decided to explore that interest. This has led him to restaurant management positions in St. Louis and New Orleans and his previous VA position as Canteen Chief of the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC in Jackson, Miss. His career also includes ownership of an Italian restaurant, developed by Santos from its conception through all phases of its operation.

He has received several certifications from VCS University. His most recent is in Advanced Business Strategies, a



Fabian Santos

course designed to help VCS managers identify common food services issues they often confront while managing their service. Other certifications include Leadership Essentials, Retail Operations Management and Preceptor Certification.

Santos embraces the Veterans Canteen Service mission and is already involved in several projects that are expected to improve the dining experience for VA employees and our Veterans. One of his projects involves relocating the entrance to the VCS Patriot Café. He describes this as “the beginning phase of the total renovation of the dining and serving areas. We are hoping to expand our offerings and improve the flow in and out.”

He is also planning some menu additions and changes. “We are going to increase the options of the Off the Grill area and bring in a new salad concept. We are also looking at trying new and different food options on the entrees and sides area.”

Santos would like everyone to know that he is “happy to be here and part of the team at the Phoenix VA.” We welcome Santos and look forward to the exciting changes that his knowledge and experience bring to our facility. ■

Healing Garden Blossoms During First Year

By Ruby Sheffer

It's spring, and in the Veterans' Healing Garden it is a time of change. Seedlings started this winter in the greenhouse are being moved out into beds. The greenhouse is ready for a new set of seeds. The sunflowers planted in winter (yes, winter) are coming to the end of the season with their drooping flower heads heavy with seeds. Flowering plants that started in the fall and held out all through the cold nights are starting to bloom. We look forward to the return of the quail, killdeer and dragonflies (when it finally rains). But those aren't the only changes.

The tiny puppy that wandered through the back fence in fall (and was adopted) comes for visits with his human and is a lot bigger than when he left. The two Bantam rooster chicks, who also came through the back fence in fall, are grown and have been adopted as well. We will miss them, but the main reason for the garden's existence is to help living beings, most especially people, get strong and ready for the next part of their own journeys.

Since participation in Transitional Work Experience is time-limited,

sooner or later the garden's first TWE crew will move on as well. Unlike the other creatures that have made their way through this garden, Veterans make up our crew that works hard with good humor and forges bonds between the garden and the rest of the medical center which are essential to any process dedicated to healing people in place. The three Veterans comprising our crew have made the changes of this first Veterans' Healing Garden year a privilege to share.

The Veterans' Healing Garden is a project of the Compensated Work Therapy program and is situated in a Green Environmental Management System storm-water management site. It is the mission of the Garden to incorporate care of Veterans with care of place. Transitional Work Experience in the garden provides Veterans with the opportunity to reduce employment barriers via part-time paid work while enabling the garden to provide goods and services to the medical center that support numerous other programs and services.

For information about participation in any of the following CWT programs, call Kristen Nordquist, ext. 5987. ■



At the beginning of our Healing Garden



Current View of the Healing Garden

Attention Veterans: Tell employers about possible tax credits for hiring you

If you're a Veteran recently hired by a for-profit or tax-exempt company, your employer might be eligible to receive thousands of dollars in tax credits. On Feb. 9, the IRS announced that employers can claim a newly-expanded tax credit for hiring Veterans. The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 provides an expanded Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for businesses that hire eligible Veterans and, for the first time, makes the credit available to certain tax-exempt organizations.

The credit can be as high as \$9,600 per Veteran for for-profit employers or up to \$6,240 for tax-exempt organizations. The amount of the credit depends on a number of factors, including the length of the Veteran's unemployment period before hiring, the number of hours worked and the amount of first-year wages paid. Employers who hire Veterans with service-related disabilities may be eligible for the maximum credit.

The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 adds two new categories of Veterans to the qualified Veteran targeted

group as of Nov. 22, 2011: Veterans certified as having aggregate periods of unemployment of at least four weeks but fewer than six months, and Veterans certified as having aggregate periods of unemployment of six months or more in the year prior to being hired.

For more information, including how to claim the credit, go to www.IRS.gov. In the Search box use the following search terms; Work Opportunity Tax Credit or VOW to Hire Heroes Act. ■

VA National Research Week Is Fast Approaching

Caring for Veterans through Discovery, Innovation, & Health Care Advancement



VA NATIONAL RESEARCH WEEK April 23-27, 2012

VA National Research Week calls attention to the achievements of VA researchers in the role they play providing high quality care to Veterans and advancing medical science. It is an opportunity to spread the word to Veterans, our elected representatives, and others about the research at our medical center and its impact on treating and preventing disease and disability.

Join us for educational events, festivities and food:

Tuesday, April 24

8 a.m. to noon

ACC basement level

Free popcorn

Games and prizes

Posters and talks by VA researchers

Wednesday, April 25

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Building 21

Tours of the Research Lab and Clinical Research Center

Thursday, April 26

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Buildings 21/27 Gazebo

Annual Research Barbecue*

*Activities on Tuesday and Wednesday include a meal ticket to the barbecue Thursday. Meal tickets are limited, so you must have a ticket to attend the barbecue. Call Angela Kuramoto at (602) 277-5551 ext. 7783 with questions. ■



Dr. Erik Schwartz showing labwork



Dr. Sam Aguayo and Dr. Diane Parrington pulling BBQ Pork



Staff Gathering at BBQ

More than a driver, Darryl Simmons delivers the best in PVAHCS

By Charles Melton

Darryl Simmons' job description is motor vehicle operator, but those three words don't come close to summing up the daily impact he has at the Phoenix VA Health Care System.

For the past eight years, Simmons has responsibility for the maintenance and repair of the PVAHCS GSA vehicle fleet. Whenever a social worker or other employee uses one of the vehicles to assist our Veterans or represent the PVAHCS in the community, his attention to detail for our vehicles literally hits the road. .

He also serves as a courier picking up parts for all departments including medical supplies and materials needed for maintenance, and often is called to

assist in transporting patients to fee basis contract appointments so it's rare that he stays in one place for long.

Although he's not assigned to the Public Affairs Office, Simmons often volunteers to help with everything from the floats for the annual VA Veterans Day Parade to escorting PVAHCS Public Affairs Officer Paula Pedene and other employees to local TV stations for interviews.

"Darryl has such a pleasant personality and he is so patient. As our driver he helps support our community outreach efforts at TV and radio stations and in doing so helps our Veterans and others understand the role VA plays in our community," said VA Public Affairs Officer Paula L.



Darryl Simmons,

Pedene, APR. When asked what he enjoys most about his job, Simmons said, "I enjoy meeting different people, especially Vietnam and World War II Veterans."

Simmons is a Veteran himself having served from 1988-97 as an infantryman/tanker fuel and electrical mechanic with duty stations at Fort Polk, La.; Korea, Fort Ord, Calif.; Fort Carson, Colo.; and Fort Hood, Texas. ■

The Topaz Clinic opened in March to rave reviews

The Topaz Clinic houses Mental Health, Recreation Therapy, Compensation and Pension and other support services. Right next door will be the new Positron Emission Tomography Scanner and other Radiology services and equipment.



My HealthVet Secure Messaging: an innovative and powerful tool

By Dr. Joel Cooper, Northwest Clinic

Secure Messaging is an innovative communication medium that is simplifying communication between patient and physician. This system is available as an option under the MyHealthVet portal at www.myhealth.va.gov. By filling out some consent forms and having them certified through release of information, patients can now directly interact with their provider via secure email.

Thus Secure Messaging eliminates the communication “middleman,” so to speak, in that it allows patients to communicate directly with the physician instead of relying on the phone system or visits to the clinic.

For example, when one of my patients wants a prescription refill, all the patient has to do is send me a secure message requesting the refill. There is no need to call the pharmacy or PACT Team line and no need for nursing staff to retrieve the message and convey it to me. Thus, it is easier for staff and patient alike, and saves valuable time.

Patients are also using the Secure Messaging system to request appointments with me, or to ask me questions about their care. This allows for the prompt processing of patient requests.

When I tell patients about Secure Messaging, I am careful to caution them against using Secure Messaging to report serious acute illness, such as suspected heart attacks or strokes, since I sometimes get busy and don't always check my Secure Messages every day. It is OK, however, for them to use Secure Messaging to ask medical questions in general, or questions about less acute illnesses.

I am starting to use Secure Messaging to report lab and other test results to patients. This should streamline communication between patient and physician. It also gives me the



opportunity to explain results, rather than relying on nursing staff to do so.

For instance, if a patient has high cholesterol, who can benefit from a drug such as simvastatin, I can inform the patient his cholesterol is high, explain why we need to treat this condition, and use the medicine I have chosen to treat it. Patients with questions can send me a follow-up message. All of this can be done quickly and directly without any intervention required by nursing staff or other PACT team members. If I want to keep my RN BSN apprised of the treatment plan for follow-up purposes, all I have to do is cc: her.

I envision sending patients reminders, preventive health information, personalized treatment plans and other items via the attachment capability of Secure Messaging. For example, I can send my patients with uncontrolled diabetes tips and tools for better control of their blood sugar. Or I can remind a patient that her PAP smear, mammogram, or fecal occult blood test is overdue.

If I were to do a complete analysis of all the patients I see over the course of a month or more, it would likely show that many of them really don't need to be seen in the clinic. Many patients just come in for refills, review

of their laboratory results, or requests for sub-specialty consultations. Secure Messaging provides a more efficient avenue for getting these tasks done, without utilizing the staff resources necessary every time a patient reports to the clinic.

As an increasing number of my patients sign up with Secure Messaging, it will be possible to query them in advance of their scheduled appointments with regard to why they are coming into the clinic. If the reason they are coming in can be better handled by Secure Messaging or telephone, then their upcoming appointment can be canceled and a time slot opened up for someone else.

Secure Messaging can be used to help eliminate in-office appointments that really aren't necessary, or to help patients better prepare for appointments by reminding them to bring in all of their current medications, outside medical records and MRI results, etc.

I am trying to get as many of my patients as possible signed up with the Secure Messaging system. In time, this tool will become even more valuable to me. As the digital revolution continues to flourish, it may even be possible one day for me to send short video clips of myself addressing the patients' Secure Messaging questions – arguably more personal than a text message alone, with greater potential impact.

I am very supportive of Secure Messaging, and expect it to make life easier and more convenient for patient and physician alike. So far, my patients have responded very favorably to the concept, and I find that many of them really appreciate getting a timely response from their physician on matters of concern to them. It's one more way we can continue delivering excellent service to our very deserving Veteran patients. ■

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

By Victor L. Nickson, PSA Turquoise Clinic

February



Stephen Case

Stephen Case, an acknowledged ancillary testing subject matter expert, is a trusted and respected member of the laboratory team. His superlatives include but are not limited to the following accolades:

participated in the prestigious Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Conference Call, a rare honor; was selected as a control substance inspector, when only the best of the

best are selected; established a Best Practice; worked with the highly esteemed Dr. Ball in the Well Woman Clinic; and was cited for that work by the national women's coordinator.

Outstanding does not even begin to describe Case's excellence. His AT policies are the gold standard by which all the nurses, who actually perform the ancillary tests, are judged. He has an AT page on the PVAHCS Web site that garners more "hits" than any other. As a testament to the page's accuracy, his external inspection from the College of American Pathologists received the highest grade -- zero deficiencies -- and the Joint Commission wrote, "Send us a copy of your Nursing

Competency Assessment program as a Best Practice."

Those who know the Joint Commission know it does not get any better than that.

His job is not merely a job to Case, "It is fun," he says, so he often stays late. He even commits his time and energy to fix computer problems, remotely, as they arise.

Case is a real person with a good and compassionate heart, who sees the world as a "glass half-full" rather than "half-empty," and treats everyone with kindness. We can be assured it is returned back to him exponentially. Staff say Stephen Case deserves this honor. ■

March



Christina DeBaun

Christina DeBaun, nursing assistant Community Living Center 1, is congratulated on being selected March 2012 Employee of the Month.

The CLC-1 is our hospice unit, and DeBaun is there to provide bedside comfort to our Veterans as they approach their eternal and final "home going." She is there to provide a compassionate, respectful and respected ear to family

members as they go through various stages of grieving.

To brighten the area and the spirits of the patients, DeBaun embraced a colorless-but-remarkable article, "Ten Signs Death is Near: What to Expect and How to Respond to the Natural Dying Process," creating a rainbow of color, a symphonic painting, a burst of lively art, that became a pamphlet utilized by the Center.

The author, Dr. Ira Byock, subsequently blessed the transformation, being thrilled that his article saw a brighter day and was being used in this important way. Her contribution is a win for the author, a win for the patients, a

win for the Center, a win for DeBaun, and a win for the VA. Her creativity is true excellence that extends beyond the VA, reaching out to lives in the community. Everyone who has seen the pamphlet is affected by it. In fact, the pamphlet is the "talk of the town," and has received plaudits from the Hospice and Palliative Care Team as well as subordinates, peers and those senior to her.

Christina Debaun is trusted by our staff to take care of our Veterans in the highest, best tradition of the VA. She is a singular professional who staff says deserves this honor. ■