



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Members of the Marine Corps and Air Force Honor Guards stand at attention as President Clinton lays the traditional wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery on Veterans Day. Thousands turned out for the annual national Veterans Day ceremony, one of many observances around the country.

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INTRODUCING

Lee Stapleton, M.D.

With the rigors of medical school and residency finally behind her, Lee Stapleton, M.D., began her career as a primary care physician at the VA Chattanooga Outpatient Clinic in Tennessee a few months ago. She is 62 years old.

Like a slowly winding road, Stapleton's journey to medical school was filled with abrupt detours and sudden stops. "Life takes unexpected turns and we end up doing things and being places we'd never imagined," she said.

She married when she was 19, while pursuing her bachelor's degree at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. Later, she raised five children. She worked as an artist, writer, social worker and even taught school for 13 years while living in a remote mountain village in the Philippines. But through it all, she had a nagging sensation that there was something else for her to accomplish.

"I always had this lingering idea of going to medical school, but just kept pushing it out of my mind," she said. "Well, it kept tugging at me and finally, when I was 57, it came to the point where I either had to give it a decent try, or simply give it a burial."

She found that her age was a barrier to acceptance at medical schools in the U.S., but she wasn't about to let that stand in her way. She applied and was accepted to St. George's University School of Medicine on the tiny island of Grenada. Though it was difficult to part with her family, she left Sewanee and moved to Grenada to pursue her goal. "In medical school, there's a lot of constant pressure and long hours, but for me, leaving my

family was the hardest part," she said.

Following medical school, she moved to England to complete her clerkship—where future physicians learn the practical skills they will need for their residency. It was during her clerkship that Stapleton developed a humanistic approach to medicine that would drive her future practice. "In England, they really value the physician/patient relationship and I think that relationship is so important to build and maintain." From her first days at the clinic, she began laying the foundation for those relationships.

According to Sanat Bakshi, M.D., chief medical officer at the clinic, the veterans Stapleton treats are warmed by her concern not only for their current ailment, but for their overall well-being. "I've talked with some of her patients," he said, "and they like the way she projects herself. They feel

she's easy to talk to, very personable. I'd say they feel very comfortable with her as their provider."

The VA Chattanooga Outpatient Clinic is located 108 miles southeast of the Murfreesboro VA Medical Center and serves 17 counties in northern Alabama, northern Georgia and southern Tennessee—home to an estimated 70,000 veterans. "I don't ever want to forget that each veteran who walks through that door is a very unique and special person," said Stapleton. "And I'd like to be remembered not as someone who became a doctor in her 60s, but rather as a doctor who has a great deal of energy and excitement for her work." ❑

By Matt Bristol



Edward A. Powell Jr.
Acting Deputy Secretary
of Veterans Affairs

Computer Security is Every Employee's Responsibility



VA has embarked on a major campaign to improve protection of the information we use in providing benefits and services to

America's veterans. While the prime focus of this effort is veterans' records, it extends to all VA information and infrastructure required to conduct business.

The time is right for this energetic and aggressive national information security program. Public expectations for privacy and confidentiality are increasing. Scrutiny from oversight organizations is intense. The threat of malicious intrusion is real and mounting. The pace of technological change is rapid, often outstripping our security efforts. VA's information enterprise is threatened by increasingly sophisticated computer viruses.

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) and VA's Office of Inspector General have undertaken a series of security assessments of VA information systems and have discovered serious vulnerabilities. These studies identify information security as a "material weakness" in VA, and seriously question our ability to maintain confidentiality of veterans' records, protect data from harm, and ensure the availability of the information resources entrusted to us.

VA has made a commitment to both GAO and Congress to improve its security. The overall plan for improvement begins with training. Every employee, contractor, and volunteer will receive a standard awareness course. Employees with special security roles, such as Information Security Officers, will receive specialized training. Other components of the plan include: continuous risk measurement, security accredita-

tion of VA computer systems, enterprise-wide virus protection, intrusion detection, enterprise-wide encryption, and security effectiveness measurement. Major improvements can come immediately with modest effort, such as simply enforcing current policy and imposing available controls.

A framework of laws is taking shape assigning individual and personal accountability and liability to federal employees under certain circumstances of wrongful disclosure of certain kinds of information. The VA Information Security Program minimizes this threat to employees while at the same time improving protection of veterans' records (by imposing controls and providing training).

Every VA employee, contractor, or volunteer uses computers in one way or another and has a fundamental responsibility for protecting VA information. Just one desktop computer in a Veterans Benefits Administration office with a virus is a threat to the entire VA. We must think of information security not as an inconvenience, but as a condition of our continued employment. Failure is not an option.

Here are some basic things every employee should do:

- Know whom to contact in your facility to report a computer security incident or to guide your review of VA's standard security awareness training.
- Safely handle, store, or dispose of sensitive information, including that on paper.
- Do not open unsolicited or suspicious e-mail messages or their attachments.
- Avoid the urge to e-mail sensitive information just for the sake of convenience.
- When your workstation begins an update of its anti-virus software, let that update finish.
- Choose a password that is not easily guessed (at least an eight-character alphanumeric combination), and protect it as you would your own personal credit card information.
- Do not install software on your computer that is not authorized as essential to the accomplishment of your official duties.
- Log off, or operate an effective password-protected screen saver, at times when your workstation must be left unattended. □

Thumbs-Up



Actor and Navy veteran Ernest Borgnine shows his approval of plans for the World War II Memorial on the National Mall. The actor toured the proposed site of the new memorial with VA Acting Secretary Hershel Gober in October while in town to co-emcee the gala variety stage show for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.



At a news conference in VA Central Office, Acting Secretary Hershel Gober announces the online availability of several veterans benefits applications.

VA Benefits Applications Go Online

Top VA officials announced at a news conference held last month in VA Central Office that veterans can now apply for health care, disability compensation, pension and vocational rehabilitation benefits online, and promised that these are only the first steps toward an electronic VA. Acting Secretary Hershel Gober said the Department's ultimate goal is to make most of its interactions with veterans available electronically.

A veteran can now fill out the form used to apply for VA health care, 10-10EZ, online and send it electronically to the VA health care facility selected by the veteran. VA employees then register the data, print the form and mail it back to the veteran for signature. Veterans also have the option of printing out the completed form, signing it, and faxing or mailing it to a VA health care facility themselves. Before going national, the online 10-10EZ form was tested at 30 VA facilities. Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas Garthwaite said VA processed about 3.3 million 10-10EZ forms last year.

The 10-10EZ joins two other VA benefits applications that are now available for veterans to complete and send through the Internet from the comfort and convenience of their own homes. They also can apply for compensation or pension (Form 21-

526) and vocational rehabilitation (Form 28-1900) benefits online through the Veterans ON-line Application (VONAPP) Web site. An education benefits form will soon be added to the site.

Completed applications are sent electronically to a VA regional office for processing, and the veteran receives confirmation that the application has been received, along with the address of the VARO that is processing it, and the VA toll-free number to call for more information. Gober said veterans can be assured that these online transactions with VA are secure. Each form is individually encrypted to protect the privacy of the veteran's personal data, he explained.

Although plans call for VA to eventually put all health care and benefits applications online, veterans are not required to apply online. They can continue to use paper applications.

All of the currently available online veterans benefits forms can be accessed on the VONAPP Web site at: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov>. Once a veteran creates a login name and password, he or she is presented with a choice of the applications that can be filled out online. The online 10-10EZ form can also be accessed directly at: www.va.gov/1010ez.htm. □

FY 2001 Budget, Other VA-Related Legislation Signed

President Clinton signed a \$47 billion fiscal year 2001 budget for VA on October 27. Approved by lawmakers earlier that month, the budget's funding level is an increase of \$2.7 billion over last year's spending limit.

The total includes \$20.7 billion for health care, which is \$1.4 billion more than last year, and \$24.7 billion for benefits, a \$1.2 billion hike.

The budget was one of several bills affecting VA employees or operations that the president signed in a flurry of legislative activity in the last weeks of the 106th Congress. Two bills include provisions that affect large numbers of VA employees.

The Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, signed by the President on November 1, includes language granting VA's nurses the same annual pay raise as other federal employees under the national comparability system. VA facility directors no longer have sole discretion in making nurse pay decisions under the new law, and it prohibits pay cuts for nurses.

The new law also revises and increases the rates of special pay for VA dentists, and adds pharmacists to the list of occupations that are exempt from statutory caps on special salary rates. These measures are designed to make salaries for VA dentists and pharmacists more competitive with the private sector. Pay for VA dentists will now be closer to that of other VA doctors.

The Long-Term Care Security Act, signed by the President on September 19, authorizes the Office of Personnel Management to establish a program under which long-term care insurance will be made available to federal employees.

Another key piece of legislation clarifies VA's duty to assist veterans with their benefits claims. Signed by the President on November 9, the Veterans Claims Assistance Act eliminates the requirement that veterans submit well-grounded claims before VA can help them find the evidence to support their claims.

VA Travel Goes Electronic

Internet-Based Travel Management System Tested

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the first federal agency to test and next year is expected to be the first to implement



on a wide scale a state-of-the-art, Internet-based travel management system.

The One VA Electronic Travel Team is near the end of a 90-day test of the new application,

Gelco's Travel Manager, at four VA sites. Comprised of staff from Central Office and field facilities representing VA's three administrations, the team has announced it expects the testing will determine whether the system offers employees the anticipated functionality and is

an improvement over current travel processing.

Only about half of VA facilities are currently using an automated travel management system; the rest use manual paper processes.

The Travel Manager system allows VA travelers and arrangers to electronically process travel documents, including authorizations, payments, vouchers and tickets, for employee and veteran travel. The system offers electronic signature approval and e-mail notification on the status of travel documents.

A key feature of the new system is a booking engine that will enable VA employees to reserve and confirm hotel rooms and rental cars over the Internet. The booking engine can also provide the traveler a complete range of airfares, and identify which flights are at the

government rate. Depending on the airline, the floor plan of the aircraft can be seen for some flights, allowing travelers to pre-select their seat assignment.

The One VA travel team has developed a schedule for VA-wide implementation of the new Travel Manager system. During the transition, the current Travel Management Center (TMC) contract will remain in place for facilities not yet using the new system.

Team members anticipate full nationwide implementation of the One VA electronic travel management system during FY 2001. In recognition of this initiative and of the past operation of the innovative TMC program, *Government Executive* magazine presented VA its 2000 Travel Manager of the Year Award in October. □

Budget (cont.)

For a veteran claiming a service-connected disability, a well-grounded claim is one that has evidence of an in-service injury or disease, a diagnosis of a current disability or disease, and a medical opinion that the current disability or disease is related to the in-service injury or disease.

This requirement stemmed from a 1999 ruling by the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims that prohibited VA from helping veterans with their claims until they could establish that they were likely to be eligible for benefits. The new law requires VA to help all veterans applying for benefits, not just those with well-grounded claims. VA must provide veterans the necessary forms and instructions, notify them of any information or evidence needed to support claims, and help them obtain service medical records and other evidence.

Although the law generally applies to new claims or those still pending when the law became effective, veterans whose claims were denied between July 14, 1999 and November 9, 2000 can request reviews of their claims. □

Three Sailors Killed in USS Cole Bombing Buried in VA Cemeteries

Families of three of the sailors killed in the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen in October selected VA national cemeteries for their burial. Two other families chose to have their loved ones interred in Arlington National Cemetery, and one chose the Antietam, Md., National Cemetery operated by the Department of Interior.

Another sailor killed on the Cole, Electronic Warfare Technician Kevin Rux from Virginia Beach, Va., whose ashes were scattered at sea, is memorialized with a marker at the West Virginia National Cemetery in Grafton.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) buried Lt. Andrew Triplett of Virginia Beach at Hampton, Va., National Cemetery; Fireman Gary Swenchonis, Jr., of Rockport, Texas, at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio; and Mess Management Specialist Seaman Lakeina Monique Francis of Woodleaf, N.C., at Salisbury, N.C., National Cemetery.

NCA staff helped arrange with the officially closed, historical U.S.

Park Service facility at Antietam to bury Fireman Apprentice Patrick Roy of Keedysville, Md. The sailor's parents requested that cemetery because their son had performed volunteer work there.

The Department of Defense provided full military honors at all of the interments. From 300 to 500 people attended each of the cemetery services, including many military personnel.

For Seaman Francis' service at Salisbury, not only were Navy comrades standing in formation beside the shelter, but also local veterans organizations and members of the North Carolina Highway Patrol. Pallbearers came from various service branches, and the flag was presented to her parents by the recruiter who had signed up Seaman Francis six months before her death. A Norfolk Naval Base admiral presented the Purple Heart to her father.

The blast from a terrorist bomb in the Yemeni port of Aden killed 17 sailors on the destroyer and injured 39 others. □

Veterans Day 2000



Postal Service Senior Vice President Deborah Willhite and Acting VA Deputy Secretary Edward Powell unveil the Honoring Veterans stamp at VA headquarters. Looking on are Rep. John Dingell and Sen. Susan Collins.



President Clinton places the traditional wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns for the eighth and final time of his presidency.

The U.S. Postal Service helped kick off a weekend of Veterans Day celebrations by unveiling the design of a new commemorative stamp honoring veterans during a ceremony at VA headquarters on November 9.

The first-class postage stamp, which features a photograph of the



New York student Colin Fullam, who designed this year's Veterans Day poster, was a special guest at the national Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. With him are his parents, and VA Acting Deputy Secretary Edward Powell, at left.

U.S. flag, is scheduled to be available to the public in May 2001. Navy veteran and Postal Service Senior Vice President

Deborah Willhite represented the Postal Service at the ceremony. She said the stamp "reminds us of the thousands of Americans who have fought to keep our country free, and it will serve as a 'thank you' to those who continue to serve as members of veterans service organizations."

Acting VA Deputy Secretary Edward Powell joined Willhite, Senator Susan M. Collins (R-Me.), Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), veterans service organization representatives and VA staff at the ceremony.

Despite the cool and blustery weather, thousands turned out for the annual national Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. President Clinton laid the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns and addressed the crowd gathered in the Memorial Amphitheater for his eighth and final time as president. His participation this year gave him the distinction of being the only president in history to attend the ceremony every year of his presidency.

In his remarks, Clinton saluted the crew members of the USS Cole for the heroism and bravery they displayed after a terrorist attack on their ship on October 12. Twenty-three officers and crew members of the Cole were asked to stand and be recognized during the ceremony. Colin Fullam, the New York student who designed this year's Veterans Day poster, was a special guest at the ceremony.

After the Arlington ceremony, the President joined Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober and other dignitaries at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new World War II Memorial.

VA facilities across the nation also honored veterans by hosting or participating in local ceremonies, parades and stand downs for homeless veterans throughout the weekend. □



An estimated 10,000 people attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the World War II Memorial on the National Mall.

HR Team's Legislative Proposals Signed Into Law



VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management Ventris Gibson prepares to present a special contribution award to a group of Human Resources employees who created legislative proposals designed to enhance employee recruitment and retention.

VA line organizations accomplish their missions more effectively," Gibson said. "Seven of their eight initial proposals were recommended in the VA legislative package in FY 2000. Two of them were recently signed into law by the President as part of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000. Four of the remaining five have successfully cleared VA's internal review process and will be forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as part of the Department's FY 2001 legislative package."

The two recently-enacted proposals expand the authority to make temporary, renewable appointments for "medical support personnel" for up to three years, and authorize two-year graduate technician appointments for individuals who have completed approved physician assistant training programs.

The proposals that will be resubmitted provide greater hiring and/or pay flexibility for mission-critical occupations in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Members of the HR Legislative Initiative Team include: Robert Pirie, who served as leader and liaison with internal and external officials; Robert Clayton and Gary King, core group members recognized for significant contributions to organizing and administering the effort; Brian McVeigh, who coordinated the effort on VHA hybrid issues, expanding on the significant information developed by VHA's Human Resources Management Advisory Group;

Mari Horak, who developed three Title 38 pay initiatives, two of which have been approved in VA; Carole

(continued on page 9)

Sometimes you just get tired of saying "no." A group of VA Human Resources (HR) professionals came together nearly two years ago to put in motion the changes necessary to say "yes" to line office requests to enhance employee recruitment and retention within VA.

These professionals, working together with staff from VA's three administrations, have proposed modifications in laws aimed at producing real changes in HR regulations for VA. These changes will ultimately benefit the veterans VA serves.

The HR Legislative Team's efforts were officially recognized in November at the Office of Human Resources Management's Employee Appreciation Day ceremony. The 11-member HR Legislative Initiative Team shared a special contribution award presented by newly appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management Ventris C. Gibson.

"The purpose of this group was to create legislative proposals to help

VA Knowledge Network Celebrates Grand Opening This Month

VHA's Employee Education System (EES) hosts a week-long grand opening celebration for the new VA Knowledge Network December 11-15. A special broadcast from VA headquarters on December 12 features live coverage of the ribbon-cutting ceremony and a roundtable discussion with top officials from VA's three administrations.

The broadcast schedule that day also includes programming on how the digital satellite network was developed and how to access its services, as well as other EES products. VHA field facilities are hosting local observances of the grand opening, with refreshments and mementos.

The VA Knowledge Network, a joint project of EES and VHA's Office of Information,

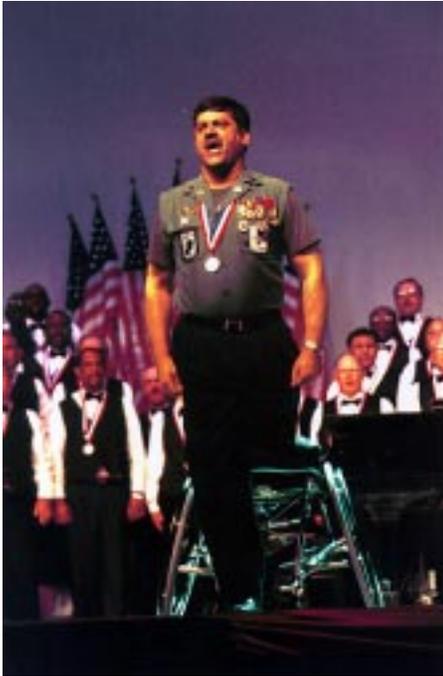
offers employees unprecedented access to educational opportunities through improved transmission quality over the old analog broadcast system and increased flexibility in programming. A total of 274 VA field facilities have the capability to access the network.

The network currently has three channels of programming: the VHA Learning Channel, the VA Communications Channel and the VBA Network. A fourth channel will be added to offer VISN-originated content, as well as third-party programming.

More information on the VA Knowledge Network is available on the EES Web site at www.ees.lrn.va.gov/products/ntc. □



Hope and Renewal Through the Arts



Wayne Miller, a VA employee and first-place winner in the national music competition's vocal solo-patriotic category, was a crowd favorite during the gala stage show for his rendition of "God Bless the U.S.A."

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival showcases the healing power of arts therapy, and it seems all of the veterans who participate in this annual event have remarkable and inspiring stories to tell of how the opportunity to express themselves creatively has changed their lives.

More than 100 veterans from all over the country, winners of national competitions in art, drama, dance and music, gathered in the nation's capital in October to participate in this year's Festival. At the end of a busy week spent in rehearsals and workshops, the veterans put on a gala variety stage show and art exhibit at Washington, D.C.'s historic DAR Constitution Hall.

None of them are strangers to adversity. They've all faced physical or emotional challenges that led some of them down the path to addiction, hopelessness or homelessness. But at the Festival, the spotlight was on their talents and stories of personal triumph. Long-time VA employee Wayne Miller was an 18-year-old Marine when he lost a leg in Vietnam on the

Fourth of July in 1969. For the first three or four months after he was wounded, Miller was paralyzed from the neck down. Depression consumed him, until he turned to his love for music. He comes from a musical family, and had been singing in front of audiences since high school.

"They say that music soothes the savage beast, and I needed soothing," Miller recalled. "I had a lot of anger that I was projecting onto others, so they didn't want to be around me.

"But when I started singing again, I found that people came back. I was accepted, not as a 'cripple' or 'half a man' or all the other labels people put on you or you put on yourself."

Today, the Washington, D.C., area native shares his gift with others as much as possible—he has sung at veterans service organization functions, at sporting events and for patients at VA medical centers. He even uses music in his work counseling fellow veterans at the Silver Spring, Md., Vet Center. "Singing keeps me going," Miller explained. "When I'm singing, I don't have to think about the ugly things that happen in life."

During the stage show, emceed by actors Ernest Borgnine and Jane Powell, Miller brought down the house with his award-winning rendition of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." The song closed the show, with the entire cast serving as a chorus. Miller's performance moved many in the audience to tears when he stood on the one leg he returned from Vietnam with more than 30 years ago and, struggling to keep his balance, proudly saluted a large flag that dropped from the ceiling. That dramatic moment, said Miller, proved that "even with my missing leg, I can still stand up for this country."

Odell Brown's musical talents took him to some lofty heights. The Army veteran has worked as an arranger, composer and digital keyboardist with such notable artists as Muddy Waters, Curtis Mayfield, Minnie Riperton and Marvin Gaye. In 1980, he co-wrote Gaye's hit song "Sexual Healing," and he co-arranged and performed with Gaye on his "Midnight Love" album. In 1982, the song won two Grammy Awards.

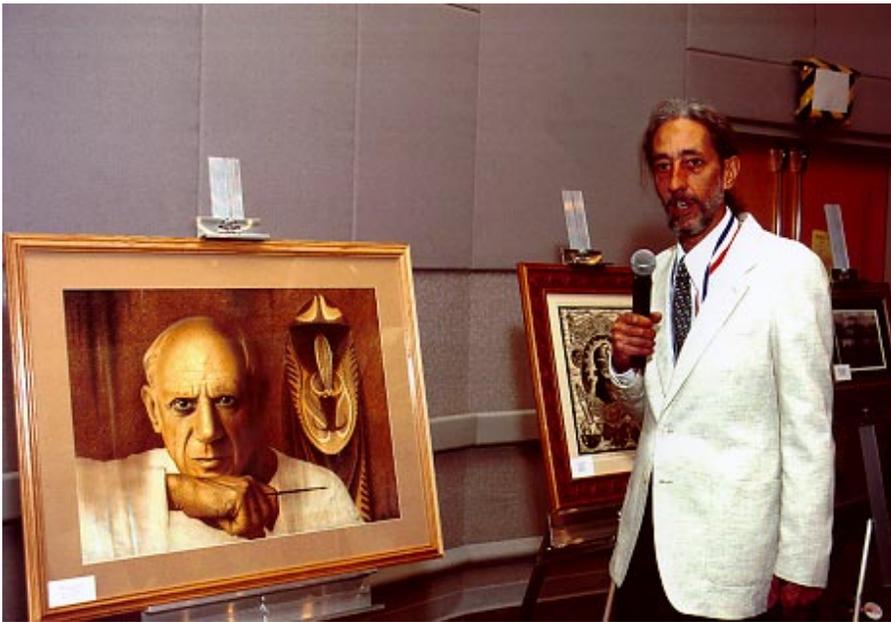
But just when he was at the top of his profession, the depression he had struggled with for a long time finally got the better of him. "I found myself homeless, lonely and too sick to care for myself," Brown recalled.

He was sitting in a park in downtown Los Angeles one day when a group of Army personnel came up to him and the other homeless people gathered there and asked if any of them were veterans. Brown and the other homeless veterans were taken from the park to a local stand down. He was examined and sent to the Long Beach, Calif., VA Medical Center to be treated for depression and a variety of physical ailments.

An old friend from Minnesota heard about his ordeal and persuaded him to move to Richfield, Minn., where he could continue his treatment at the nearby Minneapolis VA Medical Center. Learning of his musical talent, Pam Gusdal, a music therapist at the Minneapolis VAMC, talked him into playing piano for her patients. He later met Katy Ryan, a



Odell Brown, an Army veteran from Richfield, Minn., played a medley of "America the Beautiful" and "Lift Every Voice" on piano during the stage show.



Navy veteran Steven Wardlow discusses his award-winning artwork "Picasso and His Muse."

recreation therapist at the medical center, who got him interested in the Festival. In 1998, Brown gave his first performance before a live audience in 20 years at the Festival in Houston.

Known for his stirring and powerful performances on the piano, Brown played a medley of "America the Beautiful" and "Lift Every Voice" during this year's show. His life has changed dramatically since that fateful day in the park—his health has improved significantly, he has completed building a state-of-the-art recording studio, and he married that old friend from Minnesota.

As audience members, Festival staff and volunteers viewed the artwork on display in the lobby of Constitution Hall, many were drawn to the winning work in the pastels category, entitled "Picasso and His Muse." The artist behind the painting is Steven Wardlow, a Navy veteran and native of Omaha, Neb. Surprisingly, though he began painting at age three, he has no formal art training. A loner growing up, Wardlow often skipped school to spend the day analyzing the works of the Old Masters in an Omaha art museum.

"I was so upset when I found out I had to go to kindergarten that I refused to leave the house," Wardlow recalled. "It wasn't until I got to school and saw the easels that I calmed down."

He served on an aircraft carrier in the Navy, and worked as an illustrator for Armed Forces Radio and Television. Today, he's a recovering alcoholic who finds inner strength and focus through his art.

"He can paint anything he sees," said his mother, Donna Wardlow-Keating. "He can work in any medium. He spent years teaching

HR Team (cont.)

Harman, who served as VBA principal and developed two issues critical to veterans claims examiners; Elodie Murray, who assisted in development of Title 5 staffing and cost issues;

Alan Beale, who focused on special salary rate implications; John Murray, who served as Office of Human Resources liaison with VBA; Mary Alan Beckley, who participated in early organizational development and data gathering; and Joyce Hunter, who served as VBA representative until transferring to the Inspector General's office.

The group was an outgrowth of the 1998 VA Human Resources Conference in Atlanta. Its purpose is to respond to the need for increased HR flexibility to enhance VA's ability to recruit and retain high-quality staff by seeking out VA line organizations and working with them to develop these legislative proposals. Rather than saying "no," this group

himself the Old Masters' techniques, learning to work from dark to light." His collection of works ranges from portraits to animals, nudes and still-lives. Someday, he'd like to try sculpting marble. "Art," said Wardlow, "is poetry waiting to be spoken."

Hosted this year by the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is sponsored by VA with the help of this year's co-sponsor, Help Hospitalized Veterans, and national host sponsors, the American Legion Auxiliary and Non Commissioned Officers Association. Nearly 3,000 veterans receiving treatment at almost 100 VA facilities competed at the local level for the opportunity to come to the Festival as national winners.

Liz Nealy, a recreation therapist at the Houston VA Medical Center and the Festival's national drama chairperson, was honored at the closing banquet as this year's recipient of the Shirley Jefferies Award. The award is presently annually to an individual who demonstrates outstanding dedication to the success of the event. Next year's Festival will be held October 15-21 in Prescott, Arizona. □

listened to VA managers and created solutions for real HR issues facing the Department. The success of this legislative team's efforts re-emphasizes the value of VA HR professionals' roles as strategic partners with management.

The HR Legislative Initiative Team started with three core members and soon added HR functional experts from the three administrations. "The legislative team's approach was unlike that of any other HR proposal in the past," said Gibson.

"It was a One VA team effort coordinated within Human Resources with the full collaboration and participation of our principal customers. Stakeholders such as Congressional Affairs, General Counsel and Budget were brought into the process early on. It was a pioneering effort that has set the stage for future support for VA strategic goals." □

VA Facilities Focus on Identifying Future Leaders



Debra Cranshaw (right), a medical clerk at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, meets with her mentor Patt Mueller, a Decision Support System senior analyst, to discuss the outline for her mentoring program project.

If VA's future leaders were chosen by default—not because they're the most qualified, but because there are no other candidates—could the Department continue to provide world-class service to veterans and their families? Not likely. As experienced staff members draw nearer to retirement, VA facilities from coast to coast are placing increased emphasis on professional development for younger employees.

At the **Bay Pines, Fla., VA Medical Center**, employees in grades 9 through 12 (or equivalent) are participating in a program called Leadership Bay Pines. Modeled after Leadership VA, the Department-wide professional development program for grade 13 or higher employees, Leadership Bay Pines selects candidates from both the VA medical center in Bay Pines and the VA regional office in St. Petersburg to participate in each six-month class.

"We've been talking about succession planning for a long time now," noted Tony Dobies, staff assistant to the medical center director, who along with Margaret Macklin, a management analyst at the regional office, coordinates the Leadership Bay Pines program. "And what we're trying to do is to groom mid-level managers who may one day take on more responsibility."

In addition to their classroom curricula, students in Leadership Bay

Pines are charged with tackling a project that affects both VBA and VHA operations. One class examined ways to improve the efficiency of the compensation and pension claims process, and the most recent class developed a one-source reference brochure tailored to

Florida veterans that details veterans benefits administered by all three VA administrations. "This is a fantastic program," said recent graduate Danny Clay, an Air Force veteran who is now in the Rating Board Training Unit at the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office. "Not only do you get an overall picture of VA, but you also get in line with the One VA mission."

Seasoned professionals with proven leadership abilities are serving as mentors for younger, up-and-coming employees through a formal mentoring program at the **VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System**. Consistent with VHA's High Performance Development Model, the mentoring program is used to identify potential future managers and nurture their blossoming leadership skills.

Debra Cranshaw, a medical clerk who's been with the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System for a little more than three years, said she joined the mentoring program to learn not only leadership skills, but also budgets and fiscal reports. She teamed with Patt Mueller, a Decision Support System senior analyst with 28 years of VA experience, for the nine-month program.

They met each week to discuss various leadership philosophies, the VHA structure and to come up with a project that would give Cranshaw hands-on budgeting experience. "We worked together on a cost-savings

project," said Mueller. The two collected information on the purchasing of reference materials and discovered instances of duplicate purchases and inconsistent cost coding. "When we saw that, we decided to centralize the purchase of all periodicals so we could get a better grasp on how much we're spending," said Mueller.

The information they collected was used to create a database in the library through which all purchases are now coordinated. "Their project is having an impact," reported John Howard, a Human Resources program specialist who co-chairs the mentoring program. "Preliminary data suggest a decrease of expenditures from Learning Resources as well as requiring fewer services using their fund control points," he explained. As the first mentoring class came to an end, each of the mentoring teams presented their project outcomes during a graduation ceremony.

At the **St. Paul, Minn., VA Regional Office**, the LIFT: Leadership Initiatives For Tomorrow intern program combines classroom assignments, individual exercises and mentoring to help employees in grades 7 through 11 develop their leadership skills. "Our students team with mentors and their supervisors to create an individual development plan to guide their progress through the program," said Bonnie Lacki, a management analyst who chairs the LIFT program.

Students visit the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, the Ft. Snelling National Cemetery and participate in a number of other activities to increase their awareness of the various operations within VA. "We want them to see beyond their own business lines," said Lacki.

Cheryl Seanoa, a loan specialist at the regional office, was one of seven graduates in the first LIFT class. She said participating in the program has had many benefits. "The more you see of VA, the more you're aware of how all the different branches come together to serve veterans, and that helps define your thinking in terms of One VA." □

By Matt Bristol

Miss America 2000

Her reign ends, but not her commitment to veterans

Heather French ended her reign as Miss America 2000 in October with a pledge to continue her work on behalf of homeless veterans and other veterans' issues. Her plans include writing about veterans' issues for *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper, and helping veterans in her home state of Kentucky through her role as the wife of the state's lieutenant governor, Steve Henry.

During her year as Miss America, French traveled about 20,000 miles a month promoting her platform of helping homeless veterans. As a national spokesperson, she raised awareness about the issue, and advocated increased funding and volunteerism for homeless veterans programs. She also testified before Congress on the issue, and Rep. Lane Evans (D-Ill.), ranking minority member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, recently announced plans to



Heather French helps serve a meal to homeless veterans at a stand down held in Boston in August (left); Weeks after she was crowned Miss America, French visited veterans at the Lexington VA Medical Center in her home state of Kentucky (below left); French shows her crown to families of homeless veterans at a holiday stand down last year in Indianapolis (above).



introduce comprehensive homeless veterans legislation named in French's honor.

Acting VA Secretary Hershel Gober joined French in Atlantic City, N.J., for her final press conference as Miss America days before she crowned her successor. Gober presented French an etched glass memento honoring her work with VA on behalf of homeless veterans. French participated in an estimated 25 stand downs for homeless veterans, presented three VA homeless assistance grant checks, and visited patients at 18 VA medical centers.

The Miss America Organization recognized French's efforts on the night of the 2001 pageant by presenting its Woman of Achievement Award—an honor usually presented by the outgoing Miss America to someone else—to French herself. She is the first Miss America to receive the award, which is given each year during the pageant to a woman who has made outstanding contributions to an issue that benefits American society. □

VACO's CFC Charity Golf Tournament Raises \$4,000

Rich autumn hues of gold, orange and fiery red welcomed more than 80 VA Central Office (VACO) employees to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland for the VACO Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Charity Golf Tournament. The stage was set on a crisp November morning beaming with the promise of warm sunshine and clear skies as players sliced off a day of annual leave and chipped in a CFC donation to compete in the golf extravaganza. Their efforts raised more than \$4,000 toward the VACO CFC goal.

As VA Vice Chair for the CFC, Under Secretary for Benefits Joe Thompson encouraged employees to participate in the tournament and was pleased with the turnout. "Considering that there wasn't much advance notice, we've got a good turnout here today," he said, before driving a low shot deep down the fairway. After his shot, Thompson added, "The weather is just terrific, we're all having fun and



The team of (left to right) Don Hodgen, a program analyst from the Philadelphia VA Regional Office and Insurance Center, Under Secretary for Benefits Joe Thompson, Rick Nappi, VBA Under Secretary for Operations, and Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas Garthwaite shot a seven under par at the CFC Charity Golf Tournament.

we're raising money for a good cause."

Participants formed teams and played a scramble tournament—where each player on a particular team hits from the same spot after determining who made the best shot. Various VACO offices sponsored each of the course's 18 holes, and surprise raffles like "50/50" and "Pot

of Gold" added to the excitement.

In the 50/50 raffle, players bought tickets before the game and all the proceeds went into a jar. Later, one ticket was drawn and the winner split the \$1,140 jackpot with the CFC, 50/50. In Pot of Gold, players chipped in \$5 each, and if they hit the green after teeing off, their name went into a drawing. Sixty-eight players participated and 15 made the green. One name was selected from the 15 players in the drawing, and the winner split \$340 in crisp bills with the CFC.

Paul Nehrenberg, a Loan Guaranty management analyst who helped organize

the golf tournament, said everything ran smoothly. "It's nice to get everyone together and come out here for a day of golf," he said while recording team scores following the tournament. "And to raise so much money, it's more than we ever expected." The money raised will go a long way toward meeting the VACO CFC goal of \$410,000. □

BVA Award Honors Professionalism and Public Service

When a veteran disagrees with a decision regarding a claim for entitlement to VA benefits, the appeal goes to the Board of Veterans'



Crawford

Appeals (BVA), the branch of VA responsible for rendering the final decision on veterans' claims. BVA employs nearly 250 attorneys skilled in veterans law to consider the evidence in a veteran's record and prepare preliminary decisions for the Board's 59 Veterans Law Judges, who decide nearly 35,000 appeals of veterans' claims annually.

Each year, the Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals presents the Howard J. Schlegel Memorial

Award to one BVA attorney who demonstrates outstanding professional and public service. The award was named for a former Board member, the late Howard "Jim" Schlegel, who, because of his enthusiasm, dedication, professional excellence, personal integrity and active community involvement, was an exemplary role model for all Board employees.

This year, the award went to Cherry Crawford, who joined BVA as an associate counsel in 1995, shortly after earning her law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"From the start of her career, she has consistently maintained the highest level of contributions to the Board by producing an above-average number of exceptional preliminary decisions," noted Deputy Vice Chairman Mary Sabulsky, the 1989 Schlegel Award

recipient, who nominated Crawford.

In addition to her contributions in the workplace, Crawford also participates in a number of volunteer activities. She provides brief advice and counsel to people seeking free legal services at the D. C. Bar Public Services Activities Corporation Advice and Referral Clinic, and also volunteers at the United Way, where she assists in designing programs that allow mentally and physically challenged people to lead more independent lives.

"It's very nice to be recognized by my supervisors and peers both for what I do in the workplace and in my community," said Crawford after receiving the award.

She explained that volunteering allows her to use her knowledge and abilities to help those in need. "It's also very rewarding to give something back to the community," she said. □



Detroit VA Medical Center Researchers Discover Cancer-Fighting Agent

Can a gene found in the digestive tract of a rat be the medical breakthrough that has eluded scientists for decades in their fight against cancer? Dr. Adhip Majumdar and associates at the Detroit VA Medical Center believe so. Their discovery of a complementary DNA (cDNA)—a DNA molecule that represents a messenger RNA which is involved in making proteins—may bring about the possible treatment and prevention of certain types of cancer.

“Proteins regulate the biological activity of a cell,” explained Majumdar. “And cancer cells divide quickly when lacking the messenger RNA. So we take the cDNA and put it in the human cancer cells and let the gene make its protein inside the cell.” In laboratory studies, Majumdar has demonstrated that introduction of cDNA into colon and prostate cancer cells greatly inhibits their growth and tumor-forming properties.

The researchers named the cDNA gene Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor Related Protein (ERRP) because of its structural similarity with an epidermal growth factor receptor, and hope to produce the protein on a large scale so it can be used to either complement or replace traditional cancer treatments like chemotherapy and radiation. “Our study is going extremely well,” reported Majumdar. “When we introduce cDNA into the cancer cells, it induces cell death—that’s what chemotherapy and radiation do.”

Following the discovery, the Department of Veterans Affairs filed a U.S. and international patent for ERRP as a drug for the treatment and prevention of many epithelial malignancies, including lung, breast, esophageal, head and neck, bladder and prostate cancers.

How Effective Are Hearing Aids? VA Conducts First Major Clinical Trial

Hearing aids have been in use for decades, but have recently come under fire after several manufacturers claimed their devices could improve hearing in both quiet and noisy environments. To measure the benefits of wearing a hearing aid, three popular types underwent their first rigorous scientific testing in a clinical trial conducted by VA and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, a part of the National Institutes of Health.

The results, reported in the Oct. 11 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, are the first account in the general medical literature of a clinical hearing aid trial, and show that hearing aids substantially help people in both quiet and noisy situations. The test results may enable doctors to help millions of Americans deal more effectively with hearing loss.

“A lot of people with hearing loss, especially older persons, are told that they have to learn to live with it, that nothing can be done,” said study co-author Lucille B. Beck, Ph.D., director of

VA Audiology and Speech Pathology Service. “Primary care doctors will benefit from knowing that hearing aids are an effective treatment for many patients, especially those with mild to moderate hearing loss.”

Up to 28 million Americans—including about one-third of those ages 65 and older—have nerve-related hearing loss, which can often be helped by hearing aids. Yet, only about 20 percent of those who can benefit from hearing aids wear them. One reason is that many primary care doctors are not informed on the benefits of hearing aids, said Beck. “There have been small studies, but this is the first carefully controlled, multi-center clinical trial of hearing aids,” Beck noted.

The double-blind study, conducted at eight VA medical centers, enrolled 360 patients with sensorineural—or nerve-related—hearing loss. All patients wore each of the three types of hearing aids for a three-month period while undergoing hearing tests in VA audiology labs.

They reported significant improvements in speech recognition and reduced verbal communication problems, such as interference from background noise, while wearing the devices in both quiet and noisy conditions. In addition, patients noted little difference in word recognition and distortion among the three different types of hearing aids. In fiscal year 1999, 85,000 veterans were fitted for hearing aids at VA medical centers.

VA Study Reveals Shortcoming in Standard Colon Cancer Screening Method

In the largest study of its kind, a screening of the entire colon in 3,121 healthy people ages 50-75 at 13 VA medical centers, researchers found the most common procedure for detecting colon cancer, the sigmoidoscopy, misses too many precancerous growths and instead recommended the more thorough colonoscopy. The sigmoidoscopy examines only the lower portion of the colon, about two feet, and in the past, doctors believed that if cancer wasn’t detected in the lower colon, then it was unlikely to appear in the upper region. This new study shows otherwise.

Ten percent of study participants were found to have serious precancerous growths, of which at least one-third would have been missed by the sigmoidoscopy procedure. “I think we have certainly demonstrated that you can make a case for colonoscopy as a primary screening test in men,” said study author David Lieberman, M.D., chief of Gastroenterology at the Portland, Ore., VA Medical Center and Professor of Medicine at Oregon Health Sciences University.

Though the colonoscopy is the most effective screening technique, many health insurers, including Medicare, don’t cover the procedure except for those considered high-risk patients—those with evidence of blood in a fecal occult test or a family history of colon cancer. A colonoscopy costs as much as \$1,500 while the sigmoidoscopy costs just \$200.

However, Lieberman believes the colonoscopy is still more cost-effective in the long run, because the cost of detecting the cancer early will still be lower than the cost of eventual cancer treatment. “If you can identify serious precancerous growths and remove them, you can avert the cost of cancer care,” said Lieberman.

An estimated 138,000 Americans are diagnosed with colorectal cancer each year, with 55,000 dying from the disease. But if found early, precancerous growths can be removed and prevent colon cancer. □

HONORS and awards



VA researchers **Dr. Margot S. Damaser**, a biomechanical engineer at the **Hines, Ill., VA Medical Center**, and **Dr. Eric J. Huang**, a pathologist at the **San Francisco VA Medical Center**, were among 59 federal scientists and engineers to receive Presidential Early Career Awards during a recent White House ceremony. Damaser was recognized for using mathematical modeling to conduct research on issues such as urinary incontinence and the special bladder problems faced by patients with spinal cord injuries and multiple sclerosis. Huang was honored for investigating the molecules that allow neurons to grow and survive and the role they play in degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Catherine Austin Reeves, chief of Clinical Nutrition at the **Memphis, Tenn., VA Medical Center**, was recently certified as a Fellow of the American Dietetic Association (FADA), an honor achieved by only one percent of the association's 70,000 registered dietitians.

The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research presented the Louis V. Avioli Founder Award to **Dr. Stavros C. Manolagas**, the director of the Osteoporosis and Metabolic Bone Diseases Center in Little Rock. The center is a research laboratory established jointly by the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** and the University of Arkansas for

Medical Sciences. Manolagas is studying how bone loss occurs in patients with metabolic, orthopedic and cancer-related diseases.

For exemplifying the Fleet Reserve Association's three cardinal principles of loyalty, protection and service, **Ray Hall**, director of the **San Diego VA Regional Office**, was inducted as an honorary member of the association during the organization's 73rd National Convention. Honorary membership is the association's highest honor.

The **Cardiology Clinic** at the **Philadelphia VA Medical Center** received a VA Scissors Award for making dramatic improvements in patient care. Staff members at the clinic are using computerized patient records and have installed computers in every exam room. In addition, they are networking with other VA medical centers to improve coordination of patient referrals and are making personal contacts to remind patients of upcoming appointments. As a result, the waiting time for new patient appointments has dropped from 3-6 months to 1-2 weeks and patient no-shows have dropped 22 percent, despite a 216 percent increase in new patients.

The exemplary work of the Vocational Rehabilitation Veterans Industries Program at the **Tuscaloosa, Ala., VA Medical Center**, was recognized at the Tuscaloosa Employment Support Services Association's Annual Awards Ceremony. The ceremony

honors those who have made significant contributions in promoting awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities. The Tuscaloosa VAMC received the Employer of the Year Certificate of Merit; **Beulah Sealey-Matthews**, an Incentive Therapy assistant, received the Professional of the Year Certificate of Merit; and **Tim Dennis**, a veteran in the Transitional Work Program, received the Tom Tumlin Client of the Year Award.

Nursing Education Instructor **Martha A. Jurgensen**, of the **Augusta, Ga., VA Medical Center**,



Jurgensen received the Commander's Award for Civilian Service from the commanding general of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Brigadier General Darrel R. Porr. Jurgensen was recognized for coordinating all VA clinical experiences for nurses in the U.S. Army Practical Nurse Course, Phase II, at Ft. Gordon, Ga.

Three volunteers and one employee at the **Battle Creek, Mich., VA Medical Center** received the J.C. Penney Golden Rule Award for performing outstanding volunteer service in their community. Volunteer **Melissa Hill** received a first-place award in the Youth Category and **Michael Wozniak** was named runner-up. **Roger Dillenbeck**, a member of the Disabled American Veterans, was nominated for the Adult Category, and **Todd Greenman**, public affairs officer, was nominated for the Calhoun County Corporate

Volunteer Service Award in the Employee Category. VA medical center student volunteers have won the award six of the past seven years.

Armand Audini, of Engineering Service in the **New Mexico VA Health Care System**, received an honorable mention award from Green Thumb, Inc., an organization dedicated to assisting low-income seniors with part-time employment and training. Each year, the organization names an outstanding worker in America, 65 or older, who works at least 20 hours a week. Audini was one of three New Mexicans to receive the honorable mention award.

The **VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System** (VASNHS) was named 2000 Employer of the Year by Opportunity Village, a community-based not-for-profit agency that serves people with mental retardation. VASNHS' Facility Management Service has partnered with Opportunity Village since 1993 for housekeeping services and is the largest employer for Opportunity Village's work program in Las Vegas.

Shirley Harrington-Watson, a special assistant to the VA Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration in **VA Central Office**, received the Covenant Award during the Center of Influence Reception at the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She was recognized for her work on various programs, including designing the criteria for the Jesse Brown Award. The NAACP will present the award to veterans for outstanding service to fellow veterans. □

HAVE you heard

VA received an "A" from the Senate Government Affairs Committee for its Fiscal Year 1999 Performance Reports. The committee evaluated the reports of the 24 largest federal agencies. The grades were based on an analysis by the General Accounting Office, the Congressional Research Service and the agencies' Inspectors General offices. VA and the Department of Transportation were the only federal agencies to receive an "A"; only four received a grade above "C"; and seven of the agencies received a "D" or "F" rating from the committee.

Vietnam veteran **Rusty Weatherhead**, a computer equipment analyst at the **Bedford, Mass., VA Medical Center**, traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, as part of an American hockey team to face off against the Russians in a match held during the World Hockey Championship. Players on both teams were military veterans with lower limb prostheses; the American team was made up of Vietnam veterans, the Russian team of veterans from the war in Afghanistan. "I felt great after the game," said Weatherhead. "I think the people in the audience had their eyes opened as to what people with disabilities can do." The match was part of an effort to create lower limb prostheses hockey teams on each continent, and to include the event in the 2002 Paralympics.

When the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County called for community volunteers to

participate in their 8th Annual United Way Day of Caring, eighteen employees from the **Buffalo, N.Y., VA Regional Office** stepped forward to do their part in western New York's largest volunteer event. They were assigned clean-up duties at Turner Carroll High School, the former school of **Thomas D. Brownell**, the regional office's assistant director. The group gardened, cut the grass, pulled weeds, removed graffiti, and even cleaned up the school parking lot. According to **Karen Bracikowski**, a veterans service representative, the employee participation rate in this year's event nearly doubled that of last year's. "Our efforts were very much appreciated and for our employees, it was an opportunity to learn first-hand how lives do change when a community cares."

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) employees conducted 82,717 interments during fiscal year 2000, a six percent increase over the last fiscal year, and 15 percent over five years ago. Of those interments, 57,072 were veterans, 25,468 were dependents and 177 were active duty/reservists. For the first time, usage of the cremation option exceeded one-third of the total number of NCA interments. To meet the projected increase in interment activity in national cemeteries, NCA opened three new cemeteries in fiscal year 2000.

To protect the safety of veterans participating in human research studies, **VA**

has contracted with the National Committee for Quality Assurance to monitor and accredit biomedical research at VA medical centers nationwide, making VA the first federal research sponsor to require such scrutiny and approval from a non-government authority. The action comes in response to last year's disclosure by federal oversight agencies of questionable guidelines in the procedures used to protect human test subjects at several VA facilities.

Visually impaired veterans from 24 states gathered at the **Iowa City, Iowa, VA Medical Center** for the seventh annual TEE (Training, Exposure and Experience) Tournament for Blinded Veterans. The only event of its kind in the country, the tournament has grown steadily since its inception in 1994, when about 30 golfers teed off to start the event. This year, the tournament attracted 126 veterans ranging in age from 39 to 87, according to **Kirt Sickels**,

public affairs specialist at the medical center. "It gives a little bit more freedom and exposure to those obstacles they encounter," he added. "A lot of them, prior to losing their eyesight, golfed, and this is their only opportunity to get back into it."

Dr. John C. Townsend was recently appointed director of **VA Optometry Service**. In this position, he is responsible for supervising more than 280 optometrists, 81 post-graduate residents and some 600 student externs for provision of primary and some secondary eye services, clinical education and research activities within VA. Previously, he served as Chief of Optometry for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System and as an Optometric Consultant for VISN 22 (Long Beach, Calif). Townsend serves on the editorial boards of several internationally-recognized optometric journals, including Optometry and Vision Science and Optometry. □



Dr. Dennis R. Wyant (left), who retired as director of the **Indianapolis VA Regional Office** in 1999, tied for third place in the British Blind Open Golf Tournament and took 12th place in the World Blind Championship in Edinburgh, Scotland. A 100 percent service-connected disabled veteran, Wyant was coached by his wife Jane Feldman (right) during the four-day competition, which attracted 70 golfers from around the world.

HEROES



An Operating Room nurse at the **Philadelphia VA Medical Center** was credited with saving the lives of a couple trapped in their apartment as flames engulfed the building. **William Walker** was walking by the apartment building in south Philadelphia when he saw thick smoke pouring from the building. He immediately ran inside and made his way up the stairwell, banging on doors to alert residents of the danger. He found a couple trapped in their apartment, and helped them get to the stairs. Pulling a jacket over the woman's face to shield her from the smoke, he led the couple down the stairway to safety.



Sara Tyler, a nurse manager at the **Charleston, S.C., VA Medical Center**, was looking for a place to sit down and eat her lunch in the cafeteria when she noticed something out of the ordinary. Two patients across the room were acting in an unusual manner, so she decided to investigate. As she approached, she realized one of the men was choking. She asked if he could breathe and the patient shook his head no, and put his hands to his throat. Tyler immediately performed the Heimlich maneuver and cleared a large piece of sandwich from the patient's airway.



When a fellow runner suddenly collapsed and went into cardiac arrest following a run in a city park, **Ralph**

Collins, a physician assistant in Psychiatry Service at the **Houston VA Medical Center**, raced to the rescue. He approached the victim and started performing chest compressions while another person gave breaths and monitored the victim's pulse. They continued until Emergency Medical Technicians from the Houston Fire Department arrived on the scene. The victim required angioplasty, a medical procedure for repairing or replacing damaged blood vessels, and is recovering well. Collins' heroic efforts were recognized in the Houston Chronicle.



William McCasland, an information security officer for the **VA Connecticut Health Care System's West Haven Campus** and a police officer in Beacon Falls, Conn., was on patrol with his partner, Richard Cianci, when they drove up to a vehicle sitting in the middle of the roadway. As they approached the car, they noticed its engine was running and the driver, a police officer from nearby Waterbury, Conn., was passed out behind the wheel. As they tried to revive the officer, McCasland and Cianci noticed medical tags dangling from the man's neck—he was a diabetic. Though he had apparently passed out while driving, his foot somehow remained on the brake, preventing him from plunging into the nearby Naugatuck River or swerving out of control on the highway. The officers had orange juice in their car and managed to

get the victim to drink some. The juice worked. Once they had revived the victim, the officers kept him talking and responsive until paramedics arrived. Their actions may lead to a commendation from the Connecticut State Police.



It was the kind of dramatic rescue one might expect to see on a fast-paced television show, not high in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park. But when a park ranger raced past **William Gregg, M.D.**, a staff physician at the **Nashville Campus** of the **VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System**, on the mountain trail, Gregg quickly joined in the rescue. The trail

led to Mt. LeConte Lodge, a bed and breakfast perched high atop the 6,000-foot mountain, accessible only by a steep five-mile foot trail. When they arrived at the peak, they found a man apparently suffering a heart attack. Gregg immediately stabilized the victim for emergency transport, but dense fog made airlift impossible. Their only option was to evacuate the man down the mountain on horseback, which the park rangers did while Gregg followed on foot. In a letter to VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Director Roland Moore, the U.S. Park Service praised Gregg's efforts during a hazardous emergency situation. □

In Memoriam

Dr. Ernest M. Burgess, 88, former orthopedic surgeon at the Seattle VA Medical Center and developer of the "Seattle Foot," died September 27 of age-related causes, including a stroke. The lightweight prosthetic device he and his team developed has a built-in spring that allows amputees who use it to run and jump.

Burgess also helped create computer software called "ShapeMaker," which designs prosthetic limbs that are lighter, stronger and more flexible, and he and colleagues at the Seattle VAMC developed a technique for below-the-knee amputations that reduced the number of above-knee amputations.

In 1985, Burgess received one of VA's top honors, the Olin E. Teague Award, for his "extraordinary contributions to the rehabilitation of war-injured veterans." That same year, he founded the Prosthetics Outreach Foundation of Seattle. He helped more than 6,000 amputees in Vietnam get free prosthetics, and joined a group of Vietnam veterans to help open a prosthetic research center near Hanoi's main railroad.

Burgess was inspired to work on improving prosthetics while serving as an Army surgeon during World War II, and operating on young soldiers whose injuries required amputations. After the war, he worked in Seattle hospitals and served as a clinical professor of orthopedics at the University of Washington. Although he had retired from performing surgery, in recent years he had worked with veterans groups on difficult orthopedic cases.