

# VA ALL STAR NEWS

Fall 2010



**Welcome Home**

**2010**

# VA ALL STAR NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter  
Fall 2010 Edition

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*"All Star News" is a publication produced by Stakeholder Relations Service for the employees of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. We thank the medical center staff for their never-ending commitment to the care of our Nation's Heroes."*

# WELCOME HOME 2010

## - OEF/OIF VETERANS

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center hosted a Welcome Home Event for Veterans and their families on July 31 on the campus of the medical center.

Several bands played for entertainment while the crowds gathered to support Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans and their families at the Welcome Home Event.

Guests of the event were served free food and encouraged to enroll at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center for their health care benefits.

Many of the Veterans and their family members were also able to take advantage of information booths set up along the walkways. Veterans could find information about services, Veteran Service Organizations and other organizations interested in supporting Veterans and their families.

Although the festivities are geared toward entertaining Veterans and their families, the main goal of the Welcome Home Event was to encourage Veterans to use the Tuscaloosa VA for their services.

Public Affairs Officer Damon Stevenson felt that many Veterans choose not to seek out the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center unless they feel they have noticeable injuries.

"Many Veterans experience invisible wounds of war, such as depression, anxiety and PTSD," Stevenson said. "Many



Veterans today feel like they are alone when they face these issues. We want those Veterans to know that we care and that the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center has medical staff who can assist them in their recovery."

The medical center staff also encouraged the families of Veterans to come out and enjoy a day of entertainment.

There are always things for every member of the family," Stevenson said. "This year we had military vehicles set up for everyone to view, several entertainment areas for children and great music for everyone to enjoy. Anyone interested in receiving information about our upcoming events can sign up for regular e-mail updates on our website - <http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov>."



This year's theme was "Picnic in the Park," and many people came out to enjoy the entertainment.

The Transition Center staff provided some entertainment of their own that included passes to the Birmingham Zoo, T-shirts and other items. Several of the guests were spotted doing cartwheels near the entertainment stage for some of these prizes.

Transition Center Program Manager Stephanie Massey felt that the Welcome Home Event not only entertained and provided information to Veterans, but it also provided an opportunity for the community to show their support to Veterans in the community.

"We have a lot of patriotic community members," Massey said. We are blessed to have so many people in the surrounding communities who want to help make returning Veterans feel more comfortable."

Stevenson also felt the Welcome Home Event always seems to help bring people in the community together regardless of whether they are a Veteran.

"We have even encouraged the families of Veterans to attend the Welcome Home Event, even if the Veterans are not able to attend," Stevenson said. "It is so important for Veterans and family members to know we care."

Stevenson said the event was a wonderful opportunity for not only the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, but also the Tuscaloosa and Northport communities, to welcome home our OEF/OIF Veterans.

"The event is also an opportunity for our Veterans from other eras to come out and welcome home these newest heroes who have joined the ranks by putting themselves in harms way for their country."

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By Scott Young  
Public Affairs Specialist





## WELLNESS RECOVERY ACTION PLAN TRAINING 2010



WRAP Training  
Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center  
August 10-12, 2010

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center got off to a great start in learning how staff can help promote the recovery of Veterans with the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) training on August 10-12. More than 40 VA employees and several Veterans attended this three day workshop. Several VA facilities were represented including Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, CAVHCS, in Alabama, and also Dublin, in Georgia.

Staff learned that recovery is possible and that each person can develop their own wellness plan. Each attendee learned about wellness tools and the process of developing their own wellness plans. The training was presented by two peers,

Sarah Brown and Walter Hudson, who have developed and used their own WRAP plan to reach a level of wellness from their mental and physical challenges that allow them to “live the life they love.”

WRAP was developed by Mary Ellen Copeland of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery. Through her personal experience with mental illness and her research into how other people have coped with their journey with mental illness and other illnesses and challenges, Mary Ellen Copeland developed a recovery plan for herself and others that promotes wellness.

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan is not limited to

mental illness but can be used with medical problems and any challenges in life. TVAMC staff learned to NOT define themselves with labels and diagnoses, because everyone deals with the challenges of life.

This training gave employees the tools to develop a wellness toolbox based on the five Key Recovery Concepts of Hope, Personal Responsibility, Education, Self-Advocacy and Support. Everyone can learn to promote wellness in their daily lives and in the lives of Veterans at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

WRAP is currently being taught in all 50 states and throughout the world. The University of Illinois is conducting

a research study at this time using the WRAP teaching methodologies. Favorable outcomes from a number of shorter research studies of WRAP methodologies have been published.

Tuscaloosa VAMC scheduled WRAP training in September 13-17, as a facilitator of WRAP training. TVAMC staff will be able to conduct their own WRAP recovery groups once the 18 selected employees and Veteran peers have completed this training.

Tuscaloosa VAMC also has plans to have several people trained at the Advanced Facilitator level in 2011. TVAMC will be able to provide training of more facilitators in our VA system and in VISN 7 once this training has been completed. This training and new skills will provide more exciting and powerful tools for TVAMC employees as they continue in their journey of Cultural Transformation, Patient-Centered Care and Recovery Promotion.

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Kathleen Carpenter, MSN, RN,  
BC, CNL

## Mental Health

### About the Program

The Mental Health Service Line at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center provides consultation, evaluation, and treatment for a variety of issues that can impact emotional well-being.

See information on the Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (MH RRTP) by visiting [http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov/services/MH\\_RRTP.asp](http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov/services/MH_RRTP.asp)

Mental Health conducts research and training to ensure state-of-the-art treatment.

### Services Offered

Mental health services provided at Tuscaloosa VAMC include treatments for –

- Depression, sadness, grief
- Anxiety, worry, nervousness
- Addictive behaviors
- Relationship problems
- Stress from medical problems and/or pain
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Emotional problems, such as managing anger
- Vocational issues
- Troublesome thoughts or ideas
- Confused thinking
- Aggressive or self-harming behaviors
- Memory problems

Mental Health Service Line also provides outreach to homeless veterans.

### Confidentiality

Mental health services are confidential. We will not talk to anyone about information you share unless you give written consent. Under federal law, a few exceptions to this rule exist. If you have questions, please ask your mental health consultant.

## NEW WAYS FOR VETERANS TO RECEIVE INFORMATION

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Home Veteran Services Business About VA Media Room Locations Contact Us

**TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA VAMC**

Tuscaloosa, Alabama  
VAMC Home

About this Facility

Careers

Contact Us

Emergency Response &  
Information

Joint Commission Public  
Notice

Join Our Mailing List

Mental Health Residential  
Rehabilitation Treatment  
Program

**Mail Subscription Page**

**Join or leave TUSCALOOSA\_VA\_MAIL-L**

This screen allows you to join or leave the Listserv which provides periodic updates from the medic identity and prevent third parties from subscribing you to the list against your will, an e-mail message will be sent to the address you specify in the form. Simply wait for this message to arrive, the to confirm the operation.

**Your e-mail address:**  (example = John.Doe@va.gov)

**Your name:**  (example = John Doe)

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is making it easier for Veterans to receive information about their health care facility.

Veterans and other members of the community can now sign up for regular e-mails to be sent to them. The project was designed as an attempt to better educate Veterans about services the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center offers, upcoming events held on campus, dissemination of news releases and other important information. The e-mails will also feature our quarterly publication - All Star News. This electronic newsletter highlights many recent events that might be of interest to Veterans and their families.

Veterans interested in signing up for the regular e-mail updates can sign up on the homepage <http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov> by following the link on the left side of the page labeled: "Join Our Mailing List." Once the page is loaded, it is as

simple as entering your name and e-mail address. You will then be registered to receive the updates. Subscriptions can be canceled at any time.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center has also begun the process of redeveloping the website to be more user-friendly and informative. Scrolling pictures, videos, new links and easier navigation are all a part of the ongoing process. The new homepage now has Facebook® and Twitter™ feeds to allow Veterans and members of the community to receive informative updates directly from the homepage.

The fan page on Facebook® has also been redesigned to allow Veterans to access information about the many different services offered by the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. New tabs dedicated to information about returning OEF/OIF Veterans, women Veterans, events and public affairs have been added. Much of the information

on these pages are consistent with their parent page on the TVAMC website.

OEF/OIF Veteran Program Manager Stephanie Massey wanted to find a way to reach Veterans before they needed our services; her solution - communicate through Facebook®.

"The idea was to offer information about the services available at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center," Massey said. "We felt like active-duty service members could benefit from the information well before they returned home. Many of them use Facebook® overseas, and this is a great opportunity to be able to communicate with them about something that is so important to Veterans today - issues that affect their health."

For more information about these and other exciting topics, please visit <http://www.tuscaloos.va.gov>.

By Scott Young  
Public Affairs Specialist

## WOMEN'S CLINIC HOSTS BABY SHOWER



*Dana Stephens holds a cake in honor of women*

**O**n Tuesday September 28, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center (TVAMC) held a baby shower for four pregnant women Veterans.

Dana Stephens, Women's Veteran Coordinator at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center Women's Clinic, said that these women were selected for this honor because they have received and have been receiving their care through the TVAMC Women's Clinic.

The baby shower was meant to make the Veterans feel more comfortable and at home with the care they receive at the Women's Clinic. The Tus-

caloosa VA has provided the Veterans care throughout their pregnancy and covered their doctor's bills from outside entities.

The Women's Clinic asked Tuscaloosa VA staff members and volunteers for help and gifts for the Veterans.

"We've had a good response from staff about donating gifts and volunteering their help," Stephens said. "We've also received blankets donated from the West Alabama Quilters' Guild."

Other gifts that have been donated were baby toys, bottles, baby clothes, and children's Bible books.

The shower was mainly about education and meant to educate the Veterans about the different things that come up when you are pregnant or caring for a newborn.

There were 14 speakers scheduled to speak. The speakers included a dietician, social worker, someone from suicide prevention and fee basis, a lactation consultant, and a health department representative.

"These speakers were meant to educate the Veterans on good things to know while you're pregnant," Stephens said.

Along with the speakers, there were games the Veterans played to win gifts in addition to the gifts they had already received.

The baby shower was held in the Activity Room in Building 137. The four Veterans were encouraged to bring other women not enrolled in the VA system.

The Veterans also brought their families. Some Tuscaloosa VA staff, who volunteered to help during the event, also attended the baby shower.

Stephens acquired the idea from different VA medical centers across the nation. The Tuscaloosa VA held this baby shower to stress how important these Veterans and their experiences are to the Tuscaloosa VA. Stephens hopes that the baby shower will become an annual event.

by Aman Judge  
Contributing Writer

## EMPLOYEE WELLNESS FAIR



The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held its annual Employee Wellness Fair.

Several outside vendors provided information about health care topics for the employees of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, including information from a local chiropractor.

Our own Human Resources staff provided employees with information about benefits, including retirement. The Employees' Assistance Program provided information on how employees can seek counseling and other health information.

The Tuscaloosa VA Credit Union was onsite to talk with employees about financial options that employees of the medical center have when it comes to planning for the future.

Employees could participate in free health screenings hosted by the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Employee Health Services. They provided blood pressure and other health assessments.

Along with a great day of health information, healthy eating was encouraged by the snacks that were provided.

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By Scott Young  
Public Affairs Specialist

## From the VA Mailbag

Dear Mr. Tyler,

I am writing to let you know how much I appreciate Dr. Shortall and his nurse, Gloria.

I am a WWII Veteran and it is so comforting to know that I can call or come in to see the doctor whenever I need to.

Dr. Shortall is always eager to listen and he understands all of my medical problems. Gloria is very pleasant and when I call, she is always ready to help.

I hope all the other VA hospitals have doctors and nurses on staff that care as much about their patients as Dr. Shortall and Gloria do.

I hope they will be there for a long time.

Sincerely,  
J. B.

Dear Dr. Wang and Nurse Nancy:

I want to thank you both for your good attitude and compassion expressed and showed during my doctor's visit. It was the first time in the past couple of years that I thought the VA was really the place to get medical treatment and advice.

Since that day, because of your explanation of diabetes, I have started eating correctly and exercising each day for about 20 to 25 minutes.

My blood sugar has continued to drop each day. The first time I checked it after my visit there, it was close to 200, this morning when I checked it, it was 98. Thanks.

Sincerely yours,  
T. A.

## VETERANS' JOB FAIR



The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held a Veterans' Job Information Expo in the Sports Atrium in Building 137 for Veterans and their families on August 26, hosted by the Transition Center.

Experienced Human Resources professionals and vocational specialists were on hand to assist Veterans in their search for employment.

Veterans were given the opportunity to talk to organizations that were interested in hiring Veterans and some were able to participate in on-the-spot interviews.

Several mock interviews were given to help Veterans and their families to prepare for actual interviews and there were workshops designed to help those who attended with building a solid resume.

There was also information on how to start up a business, for those who might be interested in entrepreneurship.

Several attendees were hired by organizations that were at the Expo. Overall, 201 people attended the Veterans' Job Information Expo, including 17 vendors.

OEF/OIF Program Manager Stephanie Massey and Transition Patient Advocate Michael Culver both felt that many Veterans in the community could benefit from the Expo.

The OEF/OIF Transition Center offers assistance to Veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after November 11, 1998 or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities.

Those who meet these criteria are eligible for healthcare services for a period of five years, regardless of whether they served in the Guard, Reserves or Active Duty.

By Scott Young  
Public Affairs Specialist

### Transition Center Services

Primary Care, Mental Health, Residential Rehabilitation Treatment and Nursing Home

Case Management/Care Coordination

Dental, Optometry, Audiology, Podiatry and Neurology

Traumatic Brain Injury and Polytrauma Services

Family Support Team

Specialized Women's Healthcare

Pharmacy & Prosthetics

Post-deployment Readjustment Counseling, Sexual Trauma Counseling

Alcohol and Drug dependency treatment

Vocational Rehabilitation

