

VA ALL STAR NEWS

Summer 2012



Run For The Wall
They Ride For Those Who Can't

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Summer 2012 Edition

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"All Star News" is a publication produced by the Public Affairs Office 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."

RUN FOR THE WALL 2012



RFTW quickly became an annual event in which many veterans, organizations and the community came together for a great cause.

They assemble in California and travel to Washington, D. C., every year and this marks the 12th visit to the TVAMC in a row by RFTW. Along the route, many other riders join in helping the number of participants to grow each year.

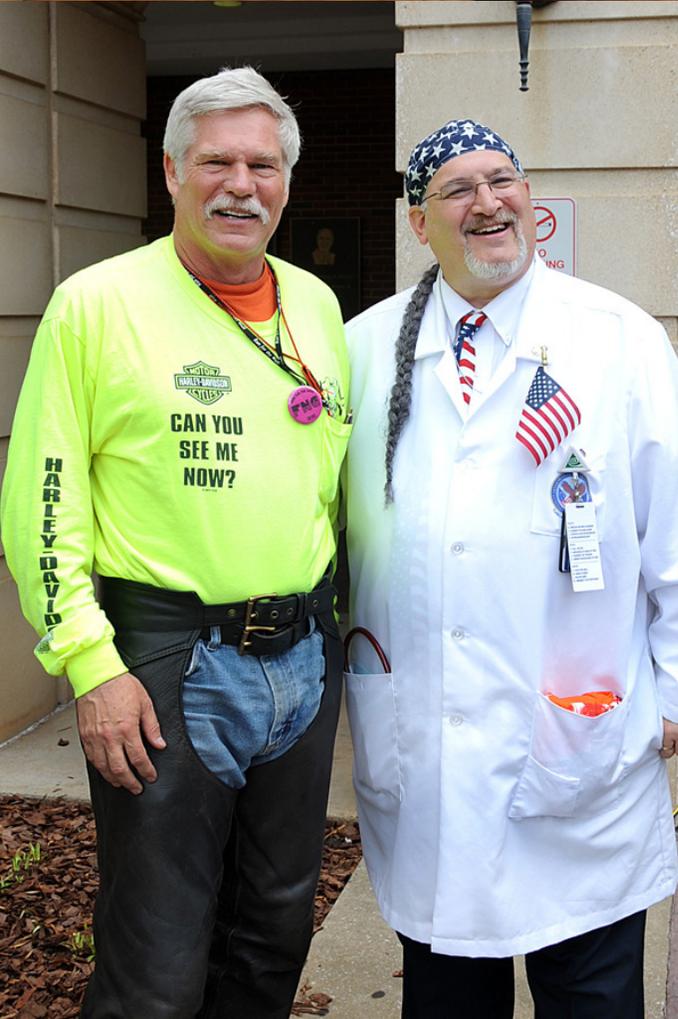
Each year many veterans and staff members gather along the drive of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center to welcome riders from Run for the Wall. Many of these riders have traveled from as far as California to eventually visit the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C. As the riders rode into Tuscaloosa, they were welcomed by waving flags and cheers from Veterans and staff alike. This year's ride included approximately 500 motorcycle riders.

These riders make a stop at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center each year to visit with patients. Since many of the riders are Veterans, the medical center provides medical care if needed. The Medical Center also provides lunch for the riders as they visit the facility.

RFTW seeks to raise awareness of not only the injuries that our veterans have faced physically and mentally, but also to remember POW and MIA soldiers and to honor returning military from conflicts abroad.

RFTW began as a one-time trip of Vietnam Veterans who rode from San Diego, Calif. to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C.







Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Memorial Day Ceremony



the colors, a ceremony for the fallen, and the playing of Taps.

Jeffery Munford, Safety Specialist, served as the master of ceremonies, and the event also included welcoming remarks from Alan J. Tyler, Medical Center Director; the Pledge of Allegiance by Deborah Cain, Voluntary Service Specialist; and the National Anthem performed by Vincent Hale, a music therapy student.

The Tuscaloosa VA celebrated Memorial Day in the Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137, with Lt. Col. James G. Lake, Vice President for Enrollment at Marion Military Institute, serving as the keynote speaker. Holt High School JROTC provided ceremonies including the presentation and posting of

A beautiful Memorial Wreath to honor those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice was presented by members of Veterans Service Organizations, who support the medical center in so many ways.



VA TAMMCS & Lean Principles

Tuscaloosa VAMC strives for continual improvement in all aspects of service and in so doing, is ultimately focused on serving the customer in the best possible way. One way to guide our focus on improvement is to become a Lean organization which simply stated is to effectively provide value to the America’s Veterans and to the staff who serve them.

The word lean may bring a picture to your mind of food, low in sugar and fat and better for you. Or maybe you are considering a tall, thin person who might be a runner in one of those long distance marathons. Lean also is thought of as being lightweight, with the sense of speed and quickness, with somewhat of an edge or fundamental fierceness such as meant in the saying "lean and mean."

These differing thoughts about lean suggests not only a physical condition, but also a certain discipline – a mental toughness. The notion of Lean carries with it a commitment to a set of principles and practices that not only get you fit, but keep you fit. People who are lean seem to be that way not just temporarily, but continuously. Lean people are committed to being lean; they act a certain way in their habits and routines. Lean isn't a fad or diet – it's a way of life.

The original idea of lean related to a business or organization and came from a group of researchers working at the Massachusetts

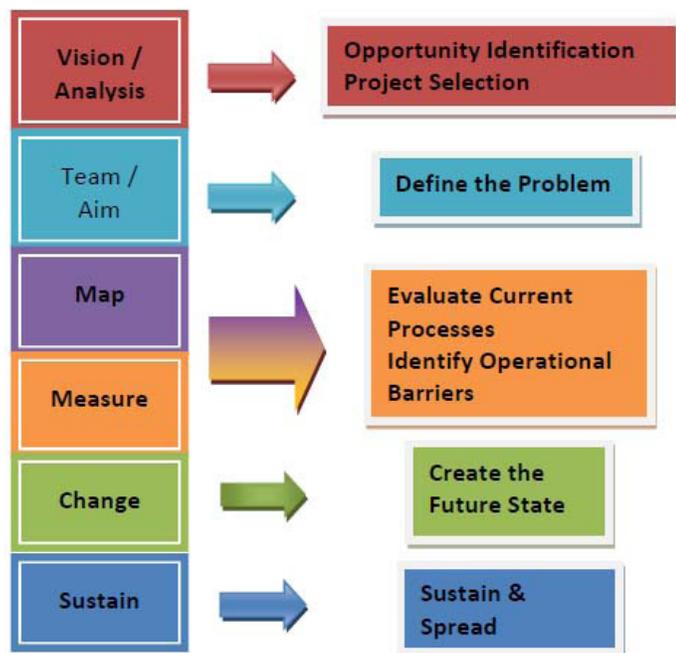
Institute of Technology (MIT) who were examining the international automotive industry. While the ideas of lean are not new with varying techniques being practiced in many different settings, its concepts and principles have become a philosophy that the Department of Veterans Affairs has incorporated into its toolbox of ways to change, adapt, and approach issues and challenges to ensure that we:

- Maintain a tireless focus on providing customer value
- Adopt an attitude of continuous, step-by-step improvement
- Respect people
- Provide what is needed at the right time, based on customer demand
- Keep things moving – in a value-added, efficient manner

- Use techniques for reducing variation and eliminating waste

The VHA Framework for Improvement values the “team” working to evaluate processes, planning and executing small tests of change, validating changes with the use of clear measurements, and then implementing positive changes so that they will be sustained over time. VA-TAMMCS is the Systems Redesign organizational framework developed to improve the care provided to Veterans at VA facilities nationwide.

Following a systematic process greatly increases the chances for successful improvements. To that end, VHA offers VA-TAMMCS, as a roadmap to success.



Million Veteran Program: Partnering with Veterans to Revolutionize Health Care

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is one of 50 VAMCs selected across the nation to serve as an enrollment site for the Million Veteran Program (MVP), a research program that will help us better understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness. The ultimate goal of the program is to transform health care.

The Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development. MVP aims to enroll as many as one million Veterans over the next five to seven years. Participants will be asked to complete a one-time study visit (approx. 20

minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out health surveys, allowing ongoing access to medical records and agreeing to future contact. This research program will establish one of the largest databases of genes and health history. The results of MVP may lead to new ways of preventing and treating common illness.

By participating in MVP, Veterans will help contribute to the knowledge base that may result in developing personalized treatments for military-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as more common illnesses, like diabetes and heart dis-



A Partnership With Veterans

ease. Results from MVP will help improve health care for Veterans and all Americans. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans personal information secure and confidential. Participation will not affect access to health care or benefits. Visit the website of the

Million Veteran Program at www.research.va.gov/mvp to learn more. For more information or to participate, call toll-free 866-441-6075, or visit the MVP clinic in Building 2, Room G25. Dedria E. Smith, B.S., Health Science Specialist, is heading up the local effort.



Connect to the Wi-Fi Service:

Find and Connect to the "VA Guest WiFi" Network on Your Device. Open Your Web Browser and Accept the Terms and Conditions to be Connected.

Wi-Fi Service Areas:

Patient Waiting Rooms Throughout the Facility; Canteen Dining Area; Library; Bldg. 137 Multipurpose Room, Serenity Garden, Inpatient Unit Dayrooms, and Cyber Cafes.

VA2K A'maze'ing Race held true to its name

By Patricia Hill
PSA, Primary Care

It was a wonderful and AMAZING inaugural event. Our employees vigorously supported the Health and Wellness program, learned their physical capabilities AND had fun in the process. The course was well laid out and surprisingly the seven teams, comprised of over 38 employees, did not 'run' over each other. No bottlenecks were noted either. This was truly a "Team Tuscaloosa" effort or more appropriately "All Hands" were on deck for service or support. Veterans from the Residential Treatment Program were stationed at checkpoints and passed out clues to the next station. Some employees, not on a team, served as Moderators to



ensure safety and adherence to the rules and the route while others like the VA Police and Employee Health were on stand-by for medical assistance.

Volunteers, through Voluntary Service assisted with the dona-

tions being collected for Homeless Veterans but one of the highlights of the 'Walk and Roll with a Twist' was the band "The Crowd Pleasers" and CRUNK Fitness. Although the race participants were tired they still managed to "shake a leg" or two for the new fitness craze. One employee, when asked how she was feeling after their 19 minute finish, said "it was fun and I look forward to the next one."

Special thanks to the TVAMC Employee Health and Wellness Committee, Shavaya Harlson, and Jackie-Hill Gordon, and on behalf of the donations benefitting Homeless Veterans and Deborah Monroe-Cain for coordinating the donations.



After 66 years, Northport man, 89, gets medal for WWII service

Courtesy of The Tuscaloosa News

Some long-ago oversight meant that Marion Fowler, 89, who was forced to stand in front of a German firing squad three times in one day near the end of World War II, didn't receive the medal he earned. His grandson, Jerry Head, started research that led to a POW medal ceremony March 13 at the Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

"He's a modest man and just apparently never cared about the recognition," said Damon A. Stevenson, public affairs officer at the VA.

It was the first ceremony of its kind at the VA, said Alan J. Tyler, medical center director. Most POW medals are awarded shortly after the incident. Because of Fowler's age, the Army moved rapidly once the information came through to get the medal struck and delivered in three days.

"That is extremely fast," Tyler said, "considering it took 66 years."

About 300 friends, family, veterans and VA staff attended the ceremony in the Sports Atrium, which included an honor guard, singing of the national anthem, medal presentation and playing of "The Army Song." Fowler and family members rolled up to Building 137 in a stretch limousine, escorted by VA and Northport police.

Head, of Blount County, said he had heard all his life about his grandfather's harrowing war experience. Fowler was inducted Nov. 4, 1942, and spent the next few years training men before going overseas. Fowler engaged in combat in France, Germany and Austria.

In early May 1945, Hitler had just died and Berlin had fallen. Orders came for Fowler's unit, C Company, 261st Regiment, 65th Division, to take 42 men and 11 jeeps to Lintz, Austria, to disarm bombs on a bridge over the River Ennes, and secure the site. But the unit was attacked on the drive from France. Four men in the first jeep were killed, and SS surrounded them.

"Death and the unknown faced them throughout the journey," Tyler said in the awards ceremony.

The captured soldiers were taken to a building in Eferding, Austria, then lined up against the wall of a barn with machine guns aimed at them. Twice more through the next 24 hours, the men faced firing squads, but Lt. Bernard Cutler, who spoke fluent German, negotiated an exchange of prisoners. Two trucks with white flags carried them to the small town of Wels, and then Ennes, Austria. Although the war effectively ended there for Fowler, it was Jan. 1946 before he landed back on American soil.



Continued next page

“He’d never been recognized,” Head said. There may have been some trauma due to the incident, and memory loss. His grandfather had trouble remembering specifics, including names of fellow POWs.

“Since it’s the Internet age, I started going online to find some of the people he’d served with, specifically those who’d served with him in combat.” He found Lt. Cutler, who corroborated Fowler’s service.

“It’s been a long time coming, and we’re so glad it’s here,” Head said, noting his grandfather didn’t always do well with crowds, but seemed to be OK with the group at the VA.

“Well, they overdid it,” Sgt. Fowler said later, at a reception in the Serenity Garden at the VA. “I appreciate it, don’t get me wrong. But we wouldn’t have went through what we went through just for some medals.”

His nephew, Dan Fowler of Fayette, said his grandmother used to tell of seeing both her sons, Sgt. Fowler and Dan Fowler’s father, go off to war without so much as a look back.

“It was just a job everybody had to do,” he said. “It was just something they had to do.”

From the VA Mailbag

Dear Mr. Tyler,

I would like to comment on an employee named Carlton Aaron who has assisted me in my time of trouble with the claim process. Before I met him, I suffered in silence due the fact that I suffer from PTSD. I met him at a routine appointment in the Selma Branch. He saw that I was distraught. He immediately came to my assistance. I explained my problem I was having. He immediately put a plan in action to assist me. I was admitted and he came to visit me. Again, he provided this veteran comfort. If not for his guidance during my claim process, I would be lost. His understanding of the way the system works provides me some assurance that the job will be completed expeditiously and accurately. Mere words cannot express my thanks to him. Thank you for taking a moment out of your busy day to read this note. Have a great day.

Sincerely,

F.D.

Dear Mr. Tyler,

I would like to take this time to express my thanks for a wonderful employee, Katrina Buffer. Katrina has gone above and beyond to help me with many, many issues, the latest being a problem with a surgical procedure I was supposed to be scheduled with VA in Montgomery. I had not received appointment cards or letters knowing the VA does this very well. Katrina made many calls to discover the notes were in the system but my procedure had not been scheduled, which she addressed. Katrina has always treated me like I was her only patient! She has a wonderful work ethic, is professional, as well as very caring and as the patient you know she cares! If all the employees at the V A had the same work ethic as Katrina there would be NO patient complaints!

Sincerely,

H.H.

PLATOON LEADER

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