

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center

# VA ALL STAR NEWS

Summer 2013



**Run For the Wall**  
They Ride for Those who Can't

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Summer 2013 Edition

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## RUN FOR THE WALL ROLLS INTO TUSCALOOSA!



Each year on the Tuesday before Memorial Day many veterans and staff 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 was the largest the Tuscaloosa VA had ever hosted, including approximately 600 motorcycle riders.

These riders make a stop at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center each year to visit with patients. The visit begins with a brief ceremony outside Bldg. 137, where they are welcomed by the Medical Center Director. 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. This year's

lunch was provided by Canteen Service and included BBQ pork or chicken and all the extras.

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

This marks the 13th 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.





# Memorial Day Ceremony

The Tuscaloosa VA honored America's fallen heroes with a Memorial Day Ceremony in the Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137, with Major (Retired) James Burch, Marine Corps Veteran and Silver Star recipient, serving as the keynote speaker. The Bryant High School Marine Corps Color Guard provided ceremonies including the presentation and posting of the colors and a ceremony for the fallen. The moving ceremony also included the playing of Taps.

Damon Stevenson, Public Affairs Officer, served as the master of ceremonies and the event included welcoming remarks from Maria Andrews, Medical Center Director; the Pledge of Allegiance by Tawanna Jones, DAV Hospital Service Coordinator; and the National Anthem performed by Herb Champion of the American Legion.



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.



## TVAMC employee wins National VA Award for Excellence in Nursing

Tuscaloosa VAMC was very proud to learn that Teresa Knox, Nursing Assistant for Geriatrics and Extended Care Service Line, is one of the 2012 National Winners for the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing!

The Excellence in Nursing Award annually honors four individuals: two Registered Nurses, one in a staff nurse role and one in an expanded nurse role; a Licensed Practical Nurse or Licensed Vocational Nurse; and a Nursing Assistant or Health Care Technician. Ms. Knox is the winner for the Nursing Assistant category.

Ms. Knox, who is assigned to Patriot's Point community living center, was recognized for establishing and maintaining therapeutic relationships with residents and their families, and with her coworkers and other staff.

Having worked with dementia patients since March 2005, Ms. Knox is recognized as a leader amongst her peers, and excels in her skills with the care of the residents with dementia. She actively participates in the implementation of care to help facilitate positive outcomes. She assisted with the development of the Montessori Activities Program, an activity program for residents living with dementia, and is very creative in getting residents to participate in activities. She also serves as a preceptor for new employees, ensuring they are educated in all aspects of care, giving them the knowledge and skills to provide age appropriate care to the residents.

Additionally, Ms. Knox has received much praise from residents and their loved ones for her compassionate care. The family of one resident was so impressed with Ms. Knox that they made a monetary donation to the medical center in the veteran's memory and in honor of Ms. Knox after the veteran passed away.



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### Veterans Can Connect to the Wi-Fi Service:

Let your veterans know they can find and connect to the "VA Guest WiFi" Network on their devices. 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 Day-rooms, and Cyber Cafes.

## PATRIOT BREW! PROUDLY SERVING STARBUCKS COFFEE

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held a grand opening on May 2 for Patriot Brew, a modern, Starbucks style coffee house, within the Liberty Health and Wellness Center.

“We are honored to open Patriot Brew proudly serving Starbucks products for our veterans, staff and visitors,” said Damon Stevenson, public affairs officer at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

Patriot Brew is managed by Veterans Canteen Service staff who also manage the medical center’s cafeteria, barber shop, and retail store, all of which are open to everyone.

Patriot Brew also offers lunch selections where you can choose from soups, salads, sandwiches, wraps and even hotdogs.

Hours are 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday.



## News Around the Tuscaloosa VA

On April 26, Tuscaloosa VAMC held a Veteran-Student academic achievement celebration at the medical center to recognize approximately seven Veteran college students for reaching milestones in academics. All the Veteran students are participants in the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program, of which Tuscaloosa VAMC is a pilot site for VA.

On May 6 – 10, Tuscaloosa VAMC hosted the National Program Manager for Environmental Programs Service (VAHCO) along with the Environmental Program Advisory Board for a meeting held at the medical center. The week also included tours of the TVAMC facilities.

On May 9 – 10, Tuscaloosa VAMC doctoral psychology internship program hosted its initial accreditation site visit from the American Psychological Association’s Commission on Accreditation (CoA). The internship training program was launched with the 2011-12 training year and accepts three interns per year. The CoA site visitors met with members of TVAMC administration, the Chief of Psychology, Training Director, current and former interns, supervisors and other affiliated training staff.

On May 28-30, Tuscaloosa VAMC hosted VISN 7 leadership and senior leaders and support staff from medical centers within VISN 7 for Executive Leadership Council. The primary focus of ELC was strategic planning.

On June 25, Tuscaloosa VAMC hosted Patricia Bradford, VISN 7 Homeless Coordinator, who conducted an in-service training with the city of Tuscaloosa Public Housing Authority. The in-service I focused on the HUD-VASH program and also included personnel from the Tuscaloosa VAMC.

On July 9-13, Tuscaloosa VAMC took part in a VHA Telehealth Services Program Review of VISN 7, including a review of the home telehealth and clinical video telehealth programs at the medical center. The VISN 7 review took place in two parts, including a remote review on June 11-13, and the second part a face-to-face review July 9-12.

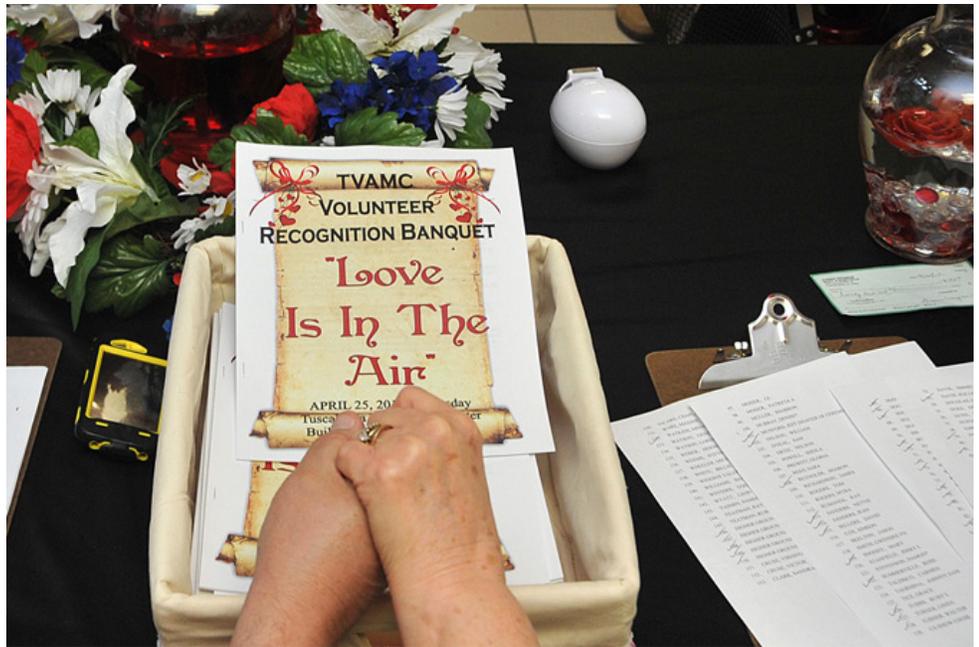
## VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION CEREMONY

On April 25, Tuscaloosa VAMC recognized National Volunteer Week by hosting a dinner banquet at the medical center for approximately 150 volunteers and spouses. Deborah Cain, Voluntary Service Officer, organized the ceremony, and the theme of the banquet was "Love is in the Air." The celebration included recognition of volunteers for milestones in volunteer hours.

Jeffery Munford, Safety Specialist, served as the Master of Ceremonies. The event included the Pledge of Allegiance performed by VA Volunteer Mary McLendon, American Legion Auxilliary; the National Anthem performed by VA Volunteer Lewis Mathews; the Invocation and a Memorial for volunteers who have passed performed by VA Chaplain Ronald Vicars; and also welcoming remarks from Medical Center Director Maria Andrews.

Another highlight of the evening included musical performances by a band named Higher Ground, whose members are Veterans from the medical center, and the University of Alabama Show Choir led by Professor Raphael Crystal.

The festive night also included door prizes that were donated by Canteen Service and other community businesses.





## Marine Corps Veteran Awarded Silver Star at Tuscaloosa VA Ceremony

On June 7, Tuscaloosa VAMC hosted a ceremony for an outpatient veteran who was recently awarded the Silver Star for service during the Vietnam War. The ceremony included remarks and pinning of the medal by General (Ret.) Charles C. Kulak, 31st Commandant, United States Marine Corps.

Gary Hill, who served in the Marine Corps from 1966 to 1969, received the Silver Star — the third-highest medal awarded for valor in the military — almost 50 years after he fought in the Vietnam War.

Mr. Hill, who rose to the rank of sergeant, was a lance corporal in Company M, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, during the battle of South Khe Sanh, which began on April 30, 1967.



His company had been assigned to a critical and dangerous mission. They were to ascend Hill 881 South surrounded by the North Vietnamese army in what retired Maj. Gen. John Admire now calls a “killing zone.” According to Admire, out of the 110 Marines and Navy corpsmen who fought on Hill 881, 27 were killed and 50 were wounded.

Hill survived unscathed.

During the battle, Hill’s platoon commander was killed and Hill and other junior leaders continued to attack. According to Admire, Hill was repeatedly exposed to

enemy fire as he engaged the North Vietnamese at close range. He crawled within three feet of an enemy bunker to attack and kill its occupants.

When his team came under attack by enemy sniper, Hill was able to locate and kill the sniper before evacuating wounded Marines from the battlefield.

One reason it took 40 years for Hill to receive his Silver Star was because of the high casualty rate during the battle, Admire said.

“The battalion and this company was virtually decimated,” Admire said. “So many were killed and wounded. So few who walked off the hill had the expertise or knowledge to submit the awards, and within a week, they were off fighting somewhere else.”

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## Holt High School Performs Flag Retirement Ceremony



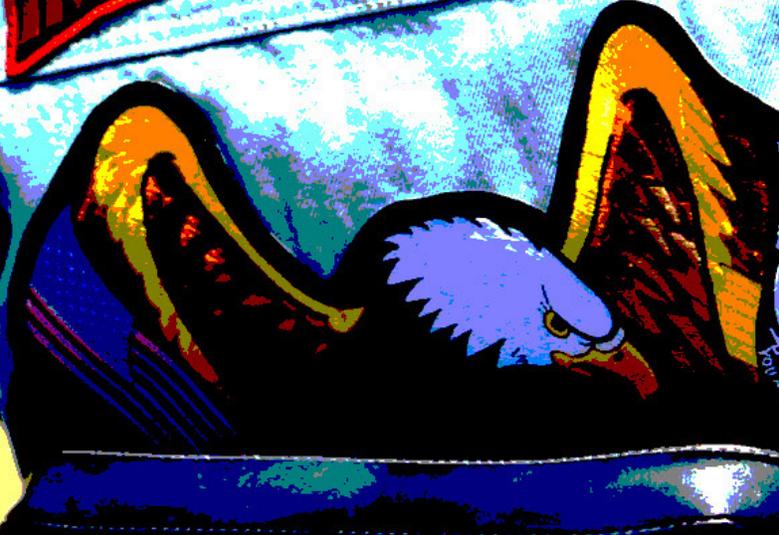
On April 16, Holt High School JROTC students, led by Col. Frank Hannah, and in partnership with Voluntary Service, held a Flag Retirement Ceremony at the Tuscaloosa VAMC where approximately 200 torn and tattered American Flags were properly disposed of ceremoniously.

The United States Flag Code states: "The Flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."





**RUN FOR THE WALL**



**POW-MIA**  
DON'T FORGET THEM