

VVA ALL STAR NEWS

Winter 2011



"The Cottages" Ground Breaking Ceremony

On the Cutting Edge of
Cultural Transformation

VA ALL STAR NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter
Winter 2011 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."

The Cottages of Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center: Redefining Cultural Transformation and Veteran and Family Centered Care

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center broke ground December 7 for the first phase of "The Cottages of Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center," which will drastically change the way we are providing long-term care to residents of the medical center.

Each cottage will be a self-contained residence, designed like a private home, housing 10 residents. Each resident room will have a private bedroom and full bathroom. The first phase of the project includes infrastructure and site preparation and provides one cottage built similar to the Green House® model, and a recreation/rehabilitation facility.

Additional minor construction applications will be completed to add to the overall number of cottages, to eventually have 10 in total. Residents will be able to enjoy a safe and secure beautifully landscaped outdoor courtyard. The cottages will be situated around a common gated courtyard adjacent to the existing Community Living Centers in Bldg. 61. Each cottage will include screened-in porches, and access to the courtyard. The courtyard will be beautifully landscaped with patios, sidewalks, and shaded gardens for the enjoyment of the residents.

"We intend to give Veterans, our nation's heroes, the sanctuary of the warm home they fought for and deserve," said Alan Tyler, director of the Tuscaloosa VA.

It's a new model of care, said project manager Dan Conville.

"We are looking to de-institutionalize and really make these cottages like home," he said.

"Tuscaloosa VA is on the cutting edge of Cultural Transformation in the VA, and serves as a model for others on how to create not just a home-like atmosphere, but an actual home for our residents, said Damon Stevenson, Chief of Stakeholder Relations Service. "To our Veterans, this is their home, and we intend for them to have a home that honors their service and sacrifices."

The medical center recently learned that designs for the cottages and renovations in mental health areas are going to be used in VHA design guides, to serve as best practices for future construction throughout the VA.

Residents in the cottages will be very active, and can even participate in their own cooking, laundry and other activities.



Doris Vawters, ACN for GEC, stands next to resident James Stewart who leads the audience in the pledge of allegiance at the ceremony.

"Studies have shown that the more active a person is, the longer they live," said Conville.

Completion of the first phase of the cottages is expected around March 2011.

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Ceremony



Commander Fields delivers a very moving speech during the Veterans Day Ceremony

The Tuscaloosa VA celebrated Veterans Day in a packed Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137, with Navy Commander Mark Fields (Ret.) serving as the keynote speaker. Gabby McClellan, a 5th grader at Arcadia Elementary, was announced the winner of the “What Veterans Mean to Me” essay con-

test. Holt High School JROTC provided ceremonies including the presentation and posting of the colors, a ceremony for the fallen, and the playing of Taps.

Damon Stevenson, Chief of Stakeholder Relations, 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 Kathy Fletcher, Pharmacy program support assistant, and the National Anthem performed by Stephenie Wallace, Administrative Assistant to the Chief of Staff.

Veterans Day has been held since 1919 but was originally known as Armistice Day, to commemorate the end of the First World War on Nov. 11, 1918. Since that time, Americans are asked to pause on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month and remember the men and women who are fighting for freedom.

“Through their sacrifices, they are making the nation and the world safer,” said Alan Tyler, director of the Tuscaloosa VA. “They are the few to whom we owe so much.”



Stephenie Wallace performs the National Anthem



Essay winner Gabby McClellan



COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN - EXCEEDING THE GOAL

Tuscaloosa VA hosted a Combined Federal Campaign celebration at the medical center on December 15, where federal employees from different agencies joined the medical center in celebrating the efforts that raised about \$1.1 million to charities this year that will be distributed in 2011.

The money will go to charities selected by employees from about 2,000 organizations, including international, national and local charities.



Xavier Lews, Heart of Alabama CFC, and Carlus Metcalfe, TVAMC CFC Coordinator unveil the grand total collected during the campaign

Homer Butler, president of the United Way of West Alabama, said he was glad to see contributions were still high, despite a difficult economy.

"I've been doing this for 30 years or more, and when times are difficult, people tend to step up and donate," Butler said.

"It seems to motivate people more."

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center employees pledged \$49,438, which was 108 percent of the VA's goal, and the most in the Tuscaloosa subregion.

Alan Tyler, director of the Tuscaloosa VA, said federal employees respond when there is a need.

"Our federal community has stepped up to the plate, as it always does," Tyler said. "It's part of the American spirit."



TVAMC's key workers get honored at the ceremony

Key Workers for TVAMC were: Carlus Metcalfe- Senior Project Officer; Kenneth Law- Senior Project Officer- Co-chair; Sonja Wainwright- Financial Secretary; Jacqueline Pryor- Event Coordinator; Sandra Sullivan- Reporter; Delores Moss; Kristen Gibson; Tranace Coleman; Susan Davis; Anthony Kennedy; Darrell Morgan; Tina Oden; Carolyn Williams; Kimberly Hyche; Camellia Eatmon; Michael Michalski; Patricia Hill; Lasonia Taylor; Charlena Taggart; Stephanie Gadson; Angela Jordan; Lashondra Wynn; Traci Burns; Sherry Washington; Sylvester Williams

Veterans Art Exhibit: "Through Their Eyes Our Freedom Lives"

Tuscaloosa VA held a ribbon cutting ceremony November 17 to officially open a gallery of artwork by Veterans of the medical center created through a new innovative partnership between the medical center and Sips n Strokes, a local business.

Veterans are taking free monthly painting courses through the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center as a form of therapy.

The art exhibit is a project that was developed and implemented by the 2010 Action Based Leadership Class at TVAMC.

"At first, when I was asked if I wanted to paint, my reaction was that I couldn't do it," said Robert Curtis, a Vietnam Veteran. "But the way it's done, it's so easy a kid could do it."

Sips n Strokes provides a free instructor, paint brushes and easels for the monthly classes. The American Red Cross donates canvases and paints to the VA for the Veterans. The class can take about 30 Veterans at a time.

Sharmel Jordan, a recreational therapist at the VA, attended Sips n Strokes classes and thought it may be a fun activity for the Veterans and then realized it could also be therapeutic.

"It really works with the veterans' upper body strength, fine motor skills, eye/hand coordination and self-esteem," Jordan said. "The Veterans may think they can't do something like that, but then they see they can do it and make something really nice."

Army Veteran Ronald Rorie, who served in Iraq

and Afghanistan, said the classes have helped him relax and serve as good therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder.



Veterans whose art is displayed and the 2010 Action Based Leadership Class cut the ribbon at the ceremony held November 17

"It helps you focus and get out of whatever you are thinking about at that moment," Rorie said. "It also surprises you at what you can do, what you can create out of your own mind."

Marine Corps veteran Timothy Wedgeworth felt he wouldn't be very good at painting either since he had never really done much other than draw as a child.

"I was really nervous," Wedgeworth said. "But it will brighten your day knowing you have such a talent, and brighten your heart."

Classes are open to current patients and Veterans who use the facility, and can enroll about 30 veterans per class.

Plant Atrium renovated, rededicated and renamed to "Serenity Garden"

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held a ribbon cutting ceremony December 21 to unveil the renovated plant atrium, which was given a new name that better represents what the area provides to our Veterans and staff - The Serenity Garden.

The indoor space features a winding brick pathway lined with water fountains, plants and hidden areas with sofas and reclining benches where Veterans, staff and other visitors can come relax, read a book, meditate, pray or otherwise just enjoy the serene environment.



"We wanted a place of sanctuary and serenity," said Alan Tyler, director of the Tuscaloosa VA. "We wanted a place where someone could come and chill out, where someone

suffering in the throes of (post-traumatic stress disorder) could come and find comfort and peace. A place where veterans can pray and search for their souls."

Having a therapeutic environment is important in therapy, said Rebecca Meyer, associate chief nurse for mental health.

"The greatest benefit is that it will be a place for them to go either individually or in groups, and it will be a peaceful, relaxing time away from things," Meyer said.

Tuscaloosa VA will also use the space for Veteran groups to meet on such topics as stress management and relaxation techniques.



HEADS UP ALABAMA! - A "HEAD" TURNING EVENT

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is proud to host the traveling art exhibit "Heads Up Alabama! Psychology Promotes Healthy Living" that brings attention to mental health and healthy living habits, at the medical center from January 7 to February 12, in the newly renovated Serenity Garden in Bldg. 137.

An Open House for the exhibit on January 7 kicked off the month long event and was well attended by visitors from the community.

The exhibit is sponsored by the Alabama Psychological Association and the Alabama Psychological Foundation, and travels around the state.

The exhibit includes 20, 3-foot-tall fiberglass heads that stand on display pedestals. The colorful, visually striking heads, created by artists from around the state, are meant to draw attention to information on the pedestals addressing topics such as how to deal with chronic illness, aging, pain, forgiveness and how to sleep better without medicine. There are topics for children that cover managing stress, healthy sleep and exercise. Parenting issues include teen suicide and helping your child learn. One head in particular focuses



on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and is very moving as it relates to what many returning troops from current wars are going through when they return.

"It's really to help people look at healthy lifestyle choices, how their behavior and emotions connect with their overall health," said Linda Alverson-Eiland, executive director of the Heads Up Alabama! public education campaign.

In addition to the art exhibit, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, along with the University of Alabama Department of Psychology, is sponsoring a series of discussions led by experts focusing on mental health issues during the exhibit's duration. Topics will include coping with chronic pain, tips for families of Veterans returning from deployment and how to age successfully.

"We are honored to host this as part of the mental health community in Tuscaloosa," said Damon Stevenson, Chief of Stakeholder Relations Service. "We are known for mental health for Veterans, but of course this is open to the public and the community. We believe it is something that can be beneficial to so many."





Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held its annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 3, in front of Building 1.

The event included train rides on Mr. Jackie's Magic Choo Choo Train, and a ceremony held afterwards. Chaplain John Bailey led the ceremony and the crowd in singing Christmas carols. Mr. Tyler also spoke at the event and led the crowd in the count down to the official lighting of the tree on the front of Building 1.



Kids and adults alike enjoy the Magic Choo Choo Train rides

From the VA Mailbag

Dear Mr. Tyler,

My name is O. C. I am a disabled veteran that is pleased to be a part of pool therapy. Your staff is outstanding and does a great job. I am a 20 year Navy veteran with extensive training in the water and I honestly thought pool therapy would be a joke. I am a first class swimmer. Pool therapy did more for me than I can ever imagine. Frank in therapy showed me several exercises and proved this was the next best thing to gold. It worked so well that after it was over I forgot to grab my cane and had the first night of good sleep that I can remember. Frank and his staff are a God send. Edward, his right hand man, is a jewel in the rough. On behalf of all Veterans thank you to the pool staff for their great work.

Gunner Mate Missile First Class, O.C.

Dear Director,

It is with a great deal of pleasure and gratitude that I feel compelled to write and express my gratitude for the consistently excellent care I receive at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. The kind, conscious dedication of helpful employees is very gratifying during these days of increasing demands upon America's healthcare system. Fine courteous individuals immediately spring to mind, such as Tonya Sephus, Clinic IV clerk, Dr. Wang and Dr. Royal, who are never too busy to go the extra mile to help me during sudden medical problems. Mr. Jones in the pharmacy stopped everything he was doing to assist me with my medication order. Your unwavering devotion to providing top notch care and strong concern for inpatient satisfaction are most welcome in these days of increased patient workload. No wonder this facility is so popular with the Veterans. I only wish the civilian health care system was as dedicated to patients well being and satisfaction. Again this is one Veteran that really appreciates it.

T.J.

