

# AVA ALL STAR NEWS

Winter 2013



## The Cottages

Celebrating Phase 1 Completion

# VA ALL STAR NEWS

Winter 2013 Edition

Acting Director

John S. Goldman

Associate Director

Paula Stokes, CTRS, CPM, M.Ed., J.D

Associate Director for Nursing and Patient  
Care Services

Patricia Mathis, RN, MSN

Chief of Staff

Martin S. Schnier, DO, FACOFP

Editor/Design

Damon A. Stevenson

Public Affairs Officer

Photography

April Jones, Medical Media

Stephen Tyler, Medical Media

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center

3701 Loop Rd. East

Tuscaloosa, AL 35404

205-554-2000

[www.tuscaloosa.va.gov](http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov)

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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."*

## Alan J. Tyler Retires After 40 Years with the VA



Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center Director, Alan J. Tyler, retired from federal service effective January 3, 2013. He had served as Director at the Tuscaloosa VA for the last five years.

“I always wanted to do something for the country,” Tyler said, who added that serving veterans has been his passion.

Tyler, a Chicago native, started his career as an alcohol and drug counselor at the Tuscon VA Medical Center in Tuscon, Ariz., where he treated veterans returning from Vietnam. During the past four decades, he has worked at seven VA medical centers across the country, including serving as Associate Director in Northampton, Mass., and also at the Birmingham VAMC before becoming the Director at Tuscaloosa VAMC.

Tyler said that of all the VA centers, he has been most inspired by the employees at the Tuscaloosa VAMC.

“Tuscaloosa is by far the best when it comes to the staff's commitment to veterans,” Tyler said. “It's given us the opportunity to do a lot. The staff has been absolutely perfect in executing the vision and putting it to work.”

## John S. Goldman Serving as Acting Director

Mr. John S. Goldman, Director of the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, Georgia, was named Acting Director of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center in January 2013. Mr. Goldman had served as the Associate Director at the Tuscaloosa VAMC from August 1993 to January 2007. Following his time in Tuscaloosa, Goldman served as the Associate Director of the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, from 2007 to 2010, prior to being named the Director of the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center on July 6, 2010.

He also previously served as special assistant to the Under Secretary of Health in VHA Headquarters and prior to that was an executive assistant to the Director with programmatic oversight of quality management, utilization review and strategic planning. He has also served as a business manager in both a nursing department and radiology department. For the period of April 14, 2009 to February 12, 2010, Mr. Goldman eagerly rose to another significant challenge by serving as Acting Medical Center Director of the Ralph H. Johnson (RHJ) VA Medical Center, a complexity level 1c facility, located in Charleston, South Carolina.



## Tuscaloosa VAMC Welcomes Maria R. Andrews, MS, FACHE, as the Incoming Director



The VA Southeast Network announced February 4 that Ms. Maria R. Andrews has been selected as the next Director of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

Ms. Andrews has a long history with VA, having served for 34 years in various positions of increasing responsibility. She comes to TVAMC from the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS) in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she served as Associate Director. As such, she was the responsible senior manager over operations of a major health care system of more than 1,900 employees and a budget that exceeds \$400 million. During her tenure in Las Vegas, Ms. Andrews was engaged in the activation of the first new VA Medical Center in over 16 years. The new Medical Center complex opened in August 2012 and is a million square foot campus housing inpatient care, emergency services, specialty services, and extended care. Ms. Andrews also served in a leadership capacity for the activation of four new 30,000 square foot Primary Care Clinics between October 2011 and February 2012. During the activation of these new facilities, she had primary responsibility for oversight of ensuring the new facilities met safety standards, equipping and furnishing the new space, hiring an additional 500 employees, and the training and education of new and existing staff for their new location and role.

Prior to entry on duty as the Associate Director at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, Ms. Andrews served more than three years in the same position at the El Paso VA Healthcare System. Her experience as a senior manager was expanded further through a leadership detail at the VA Maryland Health Care System and in the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Andrews is a graduate of the prestigious Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program, Leadership VA, and the Executive Career Field leadership development program. She holds a Masters Degree from Marywood University and a Bachelor of Science Degree from Rutgers University. In addition, she possesses a post-graduate certificate in Gerontology.

Ms. Andrews is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

# Tuscaloosa VA Celebrates First Cottage and Community Center with Ribbon Cutting and Open House

The Tuscaloosa VA celebrated the opening of the Cottages at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center with a ribbon cutting and open house in front of the expansive, 25,000-square foot central community center on November 1.

The community center will include a barber shop, a coffee shop that serves Starbucks coffee, a library and a game room devoted solely to playing Wii video games, among other planned services.

The ceremony included the unveiling of the the first cottage's name, The Magnolia House, by the Cottage residents. The ceremony also included remarks from Medical Center Director Alan J. Tyler, VA Southeast Network Director Charles E. Sepich, Chief of Staff Dr. Martin S. Schnier, and Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care Services Ms. Patricia Mathis. The keynote speaker for the ceremony was Dr. Richard Powers, Associate Chief of Staff, Geriatric & Extended Care.





## Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Ceremony



event also included welcoming remarks from Alan J. Tyler, Medical Center Director, the Pledge of Allegiance led by William Feely, Disable American Veterans, Chapter 1, and the National Anthem performed by Jeffery Nealy, Environmental Management Service

supervisor.

The Tuscaloosa VA celebrated Veterans Day on November 12 this past year in a packed Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137, with SSgt. Jeff Munford, Tuscaloosa VA employee, Army veteran and purple heart recipient, serving as the keynote speaker. Winning students from the Arcadia Elementary "What Veterans Mean to Me" essay contest were also announced. Holt High School JROTC provided ceremonies including the presentation and posting of the colors, a ceremony for the fallen, and the playing of Taps.

Cassandra Munford, Dental Service employee and wife of Jeff Munford, served as the mistress of ceremonies, and the

Veterans Day has been held since 1919 but was originally known as Armistice Day, to com-



memorate 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.



## COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN - EXCEEDING THE GOAL

Tuscaloosa VA hosted a Combined Federal Campaign celebration at the medical center on December 12, where federal employees from different agencies joined the medical center in celebrating the efforts that raised about \$1.2 million to charities this year that will be distributed in 2013.

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

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center employees pledged \$36,554.26 which was 81 percent of the VA's goal.



## News Around the Tuscaloosa VA

On January 18, Michael Culver, Transition Patient Advocate at the Tuscaloosa VAMC, was honored at an awards banquet held by the University of Alabama's Martin Luther King, Jr. Realizing the Dream Committee. Mr. Culver was the recipient of the Call to Conscience Award for helping Veterans of diverse backgrounds re-enter civilian life.

On January 24, Tuscaloosa VAMC had a celebration called Telehealth Day to educate staff and Veterans about the new telehealth medicine being used to serve Veterans through many different programs at

the medical center and through the Mobile Health Clinic. Technology for Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) and Home Telehealth (HT) were available for demonstration at the event.

On January 31, the Mental Health Service Line at the Tuscaloosa VAMC held a Recovery Celebration for patients of the medical center. Veterans were presented with "Recovery Coins" at the ceremony marking the number of years they have been working towards mental health recovery through treatment at the medical center.

On February 1, Paula Stokes, the Associate Director at the Tuscaloosa VAMC, was honored as a state-wide health care hero by the Alabama Hospital Association at their annual Health Care Hero luncheon held at the Renaissance Ross Bridge Resort in Birmingham, Ala. Ms. Stokes had previously been selected as a winner of this award at the West Alabama Council of the Alabama Hospital Association, which made her eligible for consideration for the state-wide award. She and eight other winners were recognized at the luncheon, which was attended by several Tuscaloosa VAMC staff.

## Project brings together University of Alabama students, veterans

*Courtesy of the Tuscaloosa News*

A group of interior design students from the University of Alabama sat around a table in early February playing games with veterans who live at the Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center's new skilled nursing care cottage.

But for the students, playing games with the veterans, handing out popcorn and singing carols to them during the holidays is just a small part of the group's partnership with the Tuscaloosa VA. The students are using the experience to learn about the veterans' special needs and what they may require in the interior design of senior centers, nursing homes and hospital environments.

"It was so beneficial for me to come and see them and spend time with (the veterans) when designing," said Kayla Pendlly, a UA junior majoring in interior design.

As part of the partnership, the design students worked with VA interior designers to learn about the design process and come up with their own

designs for the interior of the new skilled nursing care cottage, which opened in the fall.

Later, the students were able to come back and see how the cottage was actually designed and work with the staff to help unpack furniture and stage the home, where 10 veterans live.

As part of their experience, the students also volunteer their time by helping host events like a "fiesta" night for the veterans, a movie night and ice cream socials. They also play chess and other games with the Tuscaloosa VA residents and have assisted with a patient dance.

During one of their visits, the UA students were required to get around solely by wheelchair.

"We learned a lot about the special needs population, the ADA requirements and how much space is actually needed," said Lauren St. John, a junior from Hoover.

The Tuscaloosa VA's first cottage, named Magnolia House, was unveiled

in November. Instead of the traditional, hospital-like hallways with tiny rooms and a sterile, institution-like environment, the cottages and the newly renovated community living center at the Tuscaloosa VA have home-like environments that are designed around the special needs of the residents.

Having the students work with the veterans as well as the cottage space will hopefully help spread the idea of a homelike, patient-centered environment when it comes to nursing home and hospital facilities, said Teresa Tillman, lead interior designer at the Tuscaloosa VA.

"We feel like we are on the cusp of something new here, and this is a perfect model, where the focus is on the veteran and not the staff," Tillman said. "It will help further this idea, by the students working here."

Stephanie Sickler, assistant professor of interior design at UA, presented the partnership program recently at a regional VA leadership meeting and

will present it at two national design conferences this year.

"The experiential learning is what we are going for, because it will make a lasting impression," Sickler said.

The partnership is beneficial both for the students and for the veterans, said Tuscaloosa VA spokesman Damon Stevenson.

"This collaboration with the university is one of several that we work with here at the Tuscaloosa VA," Stevenson said. "We want to continue to get the community out to the center and be involved with the veterans."

As part of the project this semester, students will continue working with the Tuscaloosa VA and will interview veterans about their lives, Sickler said. Then, students will use their design skills to create five displays, possibly incorporating recordings and video, to help veterans tell their stories. The story "booths" will be on display at the Tuscaloosa VA in April and May, leading up to Memorial Day.

## 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](http://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.

## Homeless Veterans Quick Facts

The 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, prepared by HUD, estimates there were 62,619 homeless Veterans on a single night in January in the United States, a 7.2 percent decline since 2011 and a 17.2 percent decline since 2009.

While the number of homeless people in the U.S. dropped by less than 1 percent, according to the 2012 AHAR, Veteran homelessness has shown a more robust decline.

Each year, VA provides health care to almost 150,000 homeless Veterans and other services to over 112,000 Veterans through its specialized homeless programs.

This year, VA announced the availability of \$300 million in grants as part of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program for community organizations, estimated to serve approximately 70,000 Veterans and their family members facing homelessness.

Through September 2012, SSVF has aided approximately 21,500 Veterans and over 35,000 individuals. Since SSVF is able to help the Veteran's family, 8,826 children were also assisted, helping Veterans keep their families housed and together.

## VA Introduces New and Enhanced Features for VA Blue Button

### *Additional Features to Increase Veterans' Access to their Personal Health Information*

On Jan. 20, VA released an enhanced VA Blue Button, adding several new categories of information from the VA Electronic Health Record. Blue Button is the personal health record inside the My HealtheVet self-service platform and through My HealtheVet, VA Blue Button enables Veterans to download an electronic file that contains their personal health information.

"We are excited to introduce these new features of VA Blue Button, advancing the quality health care we give Veterans daily. The paradigm of patient-centered care means fully engaging patients in their health and care," said Undersecretary for Health Robert A. Petzel, M.D. "Enabling patients to have better access to their health information is an important step in supporting them as active partners."

Veterans now also have access to the VA Continuity of Care Document (VA CCD), which contains a summary of the Veteran's essential health and medical care information.

The document can be exchanged between providers and read by a growing number of computer applications. The VA CCD uses recognized standards that support the exchange of information between health care systems and providers for effective continued care of the patient.

Veterans can now also access VA OpenNotes, which 'opens' clinical notes, allowing Veterans to read their health care team's notes from appointments and hospital stays.

VA OpenNotes provides Veterans the ability to read and discuss notes with their health care teams, family and caregivers, offering them greater control over their health care.

Previously, Veterans with a premium My HealtheVet account could access appointments, allergies and adverse

reactions, chemistry/hematology laboratory results, immunizations and wellness reminders. New features now available in VA Blue Button include: demographics, problem list, admissions and discharges (including discharge summaries), laboratory results (microbiology), pathology reports (surgical pathology, cytology and electron microscopy), vitals and readings, radiology reports, and a listing of Electrocardiogram (EKG) reports.

In addition, self-reported food and activity journals are now also available for inclusion in the VA Blue Button.

These improvements showcase VA's continued efforts to expand the types of information available to Veterans who have an upgraded or Premium My HealtheVet account, which is easily obtained at no cost through the website at: [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).



### 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.

**For Connection Issues:** Contact 1-888-472-0796

