

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center

VVA ALL STAR NEWS

Winter 2010



Veterans Day

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VETERANS DAY



Members from the Holt High School Junior ROTC perform the Memorial to the Fallen

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center recognized Veterans Day with a ceremony to honor our nation's heroes in the Sports Atrium in Bldg. 137 on Nov. 11.

After the invocation by Chaplain Donald Harris, Director Alan J. Tyler welcomed guests to the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center Veterans Day Ceremony. Each year the medical center honors veterans here at the facility, and across the nation.

Presentation and posting of the colors was performed by the Holt High School JROTC Unit. The unit has contributed to several programs at the medical center throughout the year.

Dr. Donald J. Salls, a former Army Captain and keynote speaker, talked about some of his military experiences while serving in the United States Army. One of his most memorable experiences included what he and the rest of the men on the ship thought was a torpedo attack, but later turned out to be a false alarm. To everyone's surprise, the ship had actually struck a large whale.

Dr. Salls served as 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army in the European Theater and received many honors as a Combat Officer, including the Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster. Dr. Salls was honorably discharged after being promoted to Captain in 1945.

After giving a short history of his experiences in the military, Dr. Salls commended the Tuscaloosa VA Medical

Center for the dedicated service offered to veterans and their families.

"I have used the therapy pool here at the Tuscaloosa VA many times," said Salls. "It has helped me."

The ceremony also served as a time to recognize several students from Arcadia Elementary School as winners of the "What a veteran means to me" essay contest. John Chaney Hajek, First Place; Yakeia Simpson, First Runner Up; and Ana Thrasher, Second Runner Up attended the ceremony.

Hajek read his essay at the ceremony, describing what a veteran truly meant to him.

"When I think of what a veteran means to me, I think of the same three things," said Hajek. "I think of being thankful, the freedom they give to us and the heroes they are."

Veterans Day....

In 1918, allied forces were successful in defeating the German military. At precisely 11 am on that 11th day of November, the Germans accepted to surrender unconditionally. This day would go down in history as a day of armistice, and a day of remembrance. The Tuscaloosa VA medical Center will remember forever the sacrifices of our Nation's Heroes...



HEART OF ALABAMA CFC 2009



2009 Heart of Alabama CFC representatives meet with TVAMC Chairperson Maia Lee at the kickoff event in September

The 2009 CFC Kick-Off Celebration was held at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center on Sept. 21, in the Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137. The goal for the Heart of Alabama CFC was set at \$840,000 and the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center set an organizational goal of \$44,392

The Heart of Alabama Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), a merger of the Montgomery Area CFC, East Central Alabama CFC and the West Alabama CFC, consists of approximately 105 organizations. Of those organizations, around 11,000 members are federal, postal or military members.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center established a CFC committee to oversee the contributions made by the employees. The committee included: Maia Lee, Chairperson; Carlus Metcalfe, Co-Chairman; Sonja Wainwright, Project Officer/Treasurer; Tamie Patton, Project Officer; Carolyn Williams, Project Officer; Douglas Grice, Project Officer; Susan Davis, Project Officer; Tammy Schryer, Project Officer and more than 30 Key Workers.

Rebecca Curtis, an employee of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center was featured in the 2009 Heart of Alabama CFC video, "Touching Lives." Curtis benefited as a child from the Easter Seals, one of the many contributing

organizations belonging to the Heart of Alabama CFC. They helped make it possible for Curtis to be able to function independently as a child, who was legally blind.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center hosted a ceremony to recognize all of the hard work that was put into the Heart of Alabama CFC. On Dec. 16, each member of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center CFC Committee and Key Worker was presented with an award certificate and a letter of appreciation from Allen G. Peck. Peck was the Heart of Alabama CFC 2009 chariman. Peck explained the importance of organizations like the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

"Charitable agencies rely on funding through the CFC," said Peck. "That support is even more crucial during difficult economic times such as this, but we succeeded brilliantly."

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center was able to raise \$47,005.84 and the total CFC contributions by all organizations was \$1,130,000. The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center would like to thank every employee who made a contribution to the 2009 Heart of Alabama CFC. Through your contributions, the campaign was a success.



Hospice Unit Living Room

When taking into consideration all of the various types of care the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center offers to veterans, there is one aspect that often goes unnoticed.

TVAMC's inpatient hospice program began approximately eight years ago. The program is focused on patient- and family-centered care. The unit currently provides 20 beds for veteran use, and most of them are usually full. With a short screening process, admission to the unit can be quickly obtained. The unit also utilizes inpatient hospice referrals on site.

The Hospice program is operated by an excellent staff of palliative nurses, physicians, chaplains, dietitians, social workers and volunteers. The job can be challenging, but the professional staff work hard to help veterans stay comfortable while they are provided care during their residency.

Program Manager GEC Dr. Manivannan Neelamegam, MD, has been working in hospice units for eight years and began working with the Hospice program at TVAMC in 2006. Dr. Neelamegam felt that the program was moving in the right direction, but that some changes needed to be made to include medical students that might not otherwise receive hospice program training.

"I am very proud to work with people who have fought for our country," said Dr. Neelamegam. "Hospice needs to be given a lot of importance. Doctors and students need to be taught and should feel comfortable when dealing with the true focus of hospice programs. The patients and their families have to face reality and try to provide comfort for their loved ones."

Many of the staff mentor and counsel the patients and

their families to provide comfort in a very difficult time in their lives. Education is an important part of the program. The compassionate staff works to accommodate each patient's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. With so many different cultures, Dr. Neelamegam and the Hospice program staff find themselves in need of education to make sure that the patients beliefs are respected.

"We have to deal with patients that have beliefs about how to handle the deceased," said Dr. Neelamegam. "The patients have different religious preferences. We respect their beliefs, no matter what their values are. There are three aspects to grieving. The three phases are can't go back, can't stay there and must go on. It is the goal of hospice to work with patients and their families to help secure a pleasant end."

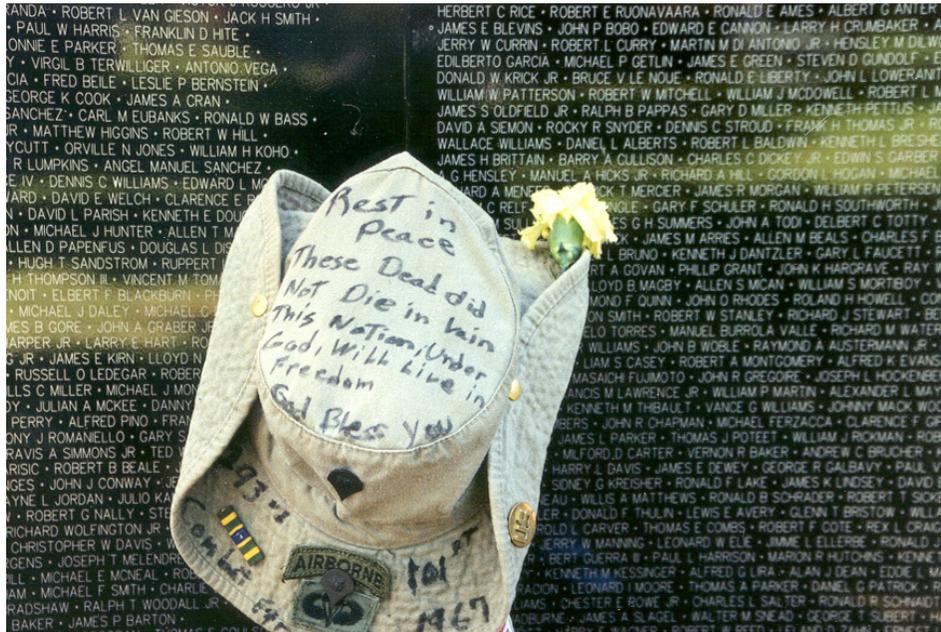
The Hospice program's main goal is to provide care and comfort, rather than curing. One way the program provides comfort is by making the patient's environment as home-like as possible. The patients have the opportunity to personalize their rooms with pictures and important objects that remind them of accomplishments in their life. The hospice unit resembles a home's family room with a fireplace, television and furniture. There is also a room for family members to stay overnight and visit with the patients.

Discussion and involvement with the families is ongoing. It is important that the hospice staff communicate effectively with the families so they know exactly what to expect. The Hospice unit remembers previous hospice patients every Christmas by making ornaments and hanging them on a tree in the unit. The families of the previous patients are invited to the unit to bond with other families who have already or are currently experiencing the services of the program.

Dr. Neelamegam has both short and long term goals for the Hospice program at TVAMC. Providing more comfort care for veterans by filling all 20 beds and increasing the unit's staff are among some of the short term goals. Some long term goals include expanding Hospice, and eventually providing an outpatient Hospice clinic. The unit is always looking to expand the number of volunteers that help provide comfort to the patients. Some of the families help to provide care that is more personal.

--Lindsey Sinclair, Public Affairs Intern
Contributing Writer

THE WALL THAT HEALS COMING TO TUSCALOOSA VA



The Wall That Heals

The Wall That Heals, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, will be making a stop in Tuscaloosa on June 9 and will be available until June 13.

The wall was designed to give those in the community a chance to experience a small scale tribute to veterans who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Stretching more than 250 feet, The Wall That Heals will be open 24 hours a day beginning Thursday June 10, 2010 and will remain open until 5:00 p.m. Sunday, June 13, 2010.

The Wall That Heals helps to educate the public about the Vietnam War through the Traveling Museum. Information can be found about those who lost their lives and how the Vietnam Veterans Memorial helps to heal those in the community who have lost loved ones over the years.

The Wall That Heals has made hundreds of stops across the United States and even visited Canada and the Four Provinces of Ireland. Through the coordination efforts of the Mike Spann Detachment Marine Corps League, the City of Tuscaloosa and the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, The Wall That Heals will be on display for the entire Tuscaloosa community.

Management Analyst/Event Coordinator Connie Booth, who is heading the planning committee for the event, felt that it would be a great opportunity for veterans at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center and veterans in the Tuscaloosa community to experience.

"We have many veterans that might not otherwise be able to experience something this important in their lives because they are not able to travel for different reason," said Booth. "It was important to try to make this possible for them. Without the combined efforts of the Mike Spann Detachment Marine Corps League, the City of Tuscaloosa and the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, we would not have been able to bring The Wall That Heals to be seen here in Tuscaloosa."

You can find more information about The Wall That Heals and volunteer opportunities at <http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov>, <http://tuscaloosamarines.org>, <http://vvmf.org> or by calling the Tuscaloosa Visitor's Bureau at 205-391-0957.

TVAMC employees can find out more information about volunteering by contacting Connie Booth at 205-554-3673.

TUSCALOOSA VA NOW USING SOCIAL NETWORKS TO REACH VETERANS, EMPLOYEES AND THE COMMUNITY



Logos used by social network sites are registered trademarks of Facebook® and Twitter™

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center launched two new social networking pages on Facebook® and Twitter™ on Nov. 23, 2009, in hopes of reaching more active duty military, veterans and community members about the services and benefits that we offer.

During a conversation with a friend who is also a soldier overseas, OEF/OIF Program Manager Stephanie Massey was asked if she used Facebook®. Since so many of the younger military were using Facebook® to communicate to their family and friends at home, she thought the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center could benefit from using social networking sites to communicate.

"If they are using this to communicate with their families, we had to find a way to utilize social networking," said Massey. "This gives us an opportunity to establish communication with returning veterans early on."

After discussing with Director Alan J. Tyler, the plan was put into motion. The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center would attempt to join millions of people utilizing social networking sites on a daily basis. The VA approval finalized the groundwork necessary for the medical center to start communicating on these social networking sites.

Director Alan J. Tyler wants to utilize the social networking sites to communicate with employees in addition to our veterans. The sites will be used for announcements about programs, updates about services offered at the medical center and new services that will be offered. Employees will also have the chance to respond to RSVP invitations to events held at the facility.

The VA has also allowed the entire facility as well as other VA facilities access to these social networking sites to promote communication.

TVAMC expects to create a blog page after final approval by the VA, in hopes of reaching even more members of the community.

Everything that is announced on Facebook® and Twitter™ will be announced on the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center Web site, <http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov>. You can search for our fan page on Facebook® by searching for Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. The link to our page on Twitter™ is <http://www.twitter.com/TuscaloosaVA>.

Please contact Stephanie Massey, Damon Stevenson or Scott Young to place postings on Facebook® or Twitter™.

MARINE'S BALL



Refreshments were served in Shane Strickland's honor at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center

Every year the Marine Corps celebrates the birthdate of the United States Marine Corps on Nov. 10. This year would be different for Shane Strickland.

After being paralyzed from a car crash when he returned home from Iraq, Strickland would become a patient at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center receiving long-term care. Normally he and other Marines would celebrate by taking part in traditions that have been shared by Marines year after year. Because of his injury, Strickland was not able to attend the annual celebration, so several of the Bessemer Anti-Terrorism Battalion Marine Corps unit decided to honor him at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center by holding a Marine's Ball in his honor.

Many of the the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center attended the Marine's Ball held in honor of Shane Strickland and watched as he received cake and a service pin.

Shane Strickland served in Iraq three times throughout his military career. Strickland continues to receive treatment from the Valor Center for Rehabilitation and is making improvement. The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center salutes his enduring courage.



Mr. and Mrs. Shane Strickland

TVAMC Holiday Festivities

The Holiday Season is special for many of our veterans here at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. Each year the medical center holds a Christmas tree lighting ceremony in observance of the beginning of holiday festivities.

Many of the units at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center planned activities for veterans and their families. TVAMC also participated in food and clothing drives to help support community members.

The first day of celebration began with a Christmas concert sponsored by the Eagles Cove unit. The Tuscaloosa Magnet School String Class performed songs of the season in the Sports Atrium.

The annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony was held later that day. Director Alan J. Tyler welcomed guests to the medical center and invited them to join in singing Christmas carols. The children enjoyed a train ride before the ceremony and pictures with Santa afterwards.

Other activities planned for veterans and their family included:

- ◇ Dec. 10 Huntington Place Elementary Sports Atrium
- ◇ Dec. 11 Christmas Party 137 2nd floor Bldg. 137
- ◇ Dec. 11 Fruit Distribution hospital wide
- ◇ Dec. 11 Parker High School Sports Atrium Bldg. 137
- ◇ Dec. 12 CRC Christmas Program
- ◇ Dec. 12 Youth Praise Band 61 CLC
- ◇ Dec. 13 Christmas Party CLC 61N/S
- ◇ Dec. 16 Cottondale Community Church Group 61 CLC
- ◇ Dec. 18 3rd Floor Christmas Party
- ◇ Dec. 19 VFW hospital wide
- ◇ Dec. 19 Christmas Party DRRTTP
- ◇ Dec. 20 Cooties Birthday Party
- ◇ Dec. 20 Bailey Rogers Bingo 2nd Floor Bldg. 137
- ◇ Dec. 22 Arcadia 61 N/S
- ◇ Dec. 23 George Winter Band 61 N/S
- ◇ Dec. 23 George Winter Band Sports Atrium Bldg. 137
- ◇ Dec. 27 Christmas Party 3rd Floor



TVAMC Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony



FUNDING APPROVED FOR MOBILE CLINIC



Example of Mobile Health Clinic operated by Cheyenne VA Medical Center

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center has been approved for funding to develop the Rural Mobile Health Clinic (RMHC). The funding was provided by the Office of Rural Health (ORH) to the VISN in December of 2008.

The clinic will help to bring both primary care and mental health services to veterans living in rural areas around Tuscaloosa county. The mobile clinic is designed to help reduce the travel time while increasing veteran access to much of the same services available at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. The clinic will visit four to five predetermined locations on a rotating schedule.

Since the RHMC will function as a primary care team and mental health team, veterans will be assigned to the mobile care team who attend appointments through the RHMC.

All veterans living in rural areas are eligible for the services and can apply for care in the same manner as applying for care at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center after the program is operational. The medical center hopes to have individuals available to assist with VA enrollment and other outreach activities. These individuals would be available for all veterans, but especially those who have never utilized VA health care.

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The medical center has not worked out staffing details for the RHMC, but it is expected to be operational by Oct. 1, 2010. The goal is to provide improved access to VA health care by bringing the services offered at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center closer to veterans. Through the RHMC, the medical center hopes to also build collaborative relationships with community agencies for future initiatives.

The vehicle used for the RHMC will be designed from the ground up, and will resemble a moving van on the outside. It is expected to have two exam rooms, a restroom, small lab and waiting room.

There are five other VA health facilities that are operating mobile health clinics including Puget Sound, Cheyenne, Clarksburg, Spokane and Togus. These clinics were funded as part of a pilot project of the Office of Rural Health.

The medical center has not decided whether the RHMC will be a provider on-site model or a telehealth model. Telehealth models use technology to address the problems of access in rural communities. It can involve video conferencing to the transfer of images for diagnosis. Provider on-site models would provide veterans with face-to-face communication with the physician, rather than using technology to communicate with the physician during visits.

Tackle The Flu Campaign



Dr. Nissenbaum and others cheer on the Tackle the Flu Campaign

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center staff came out to show their support in the fight against the flu. The TVAMC staff wanted to stress the importance in getting vaccinated against the seasonal flu and the more recent H1N1 flu virus.

Flu vaccinations were available as the staff cheered on the campaign. Many of the employees dressed up in their favorite team outfits to get into the spirit of things.

Referees were seen vaccinating employees and some were even announcing for the event.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center also wanted to stress the importance to veterans about

getting vaccinated against the flu viruses. A drive-through flu clinic allowed veterans to drive up to the facility and receive information and vaccinations against the flu viruses, without having to leave the comfort of their cars.

The flu virus can be prevented just as many other diseases. Normal sanitary actions, such as hand washing and proper coughing and sneezing etiquette by each person in the community, can help prevent the spread of the flu virus.

Employees and veterans can still get vaccinated for the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

From the VA Mailbag

Dear Director, Oct. 16, 2009

I came to your facility in March 2009 and was placed on the fourth floor homeless unit. I just wanted to tell you what an outstanding program you have here. First, the staff is top-notch. The programs are better than anything I've had in New York. In 1995, I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression and anxiety. I was treated for depression. When I arrived at this program, I was treated for all.

I am now ready to leave here confident. I will be prepared for day-to-day living, and I know I still have support here at the VA. I truly believe that this program has helped save my life. I would like to mention that Dr. Sam Popkin is a great therapist. He and the classes he teaches are informative and relative to what many of us are going through.

You and your staff should be proud of what you accomplish here. I realize that vets complain about things, but even they know that they would be in dire straights without this VA. One last thing; this VA has to be the cleanest VA I've ever seen.

Sincerely,
J.J.

Nov. 2009

Dear Mr. Tyler,

Thank you so much for all your help! My husband can now have a life that otherwise would have been so blue.

We take things for granted sometimes how important small things are-- walking, bathing, talking. Now, those things are so much easier to do. You truly are a blessing!

Thank you!

P.N.

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