

# VETERANS { SUMMER 2012 }

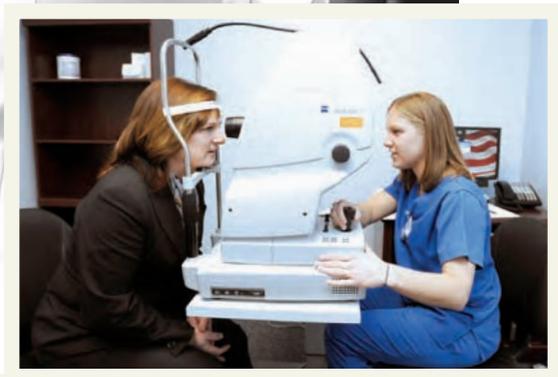
# FIRST

PROUDLY SERVING  
OUR NATION'S HEROES

 VA PRIMARY CARE CENTER

CARE THAT GOES  
THE DISTANCE  
**Close to  
Home**

VA outpatient clinics are helping  
Veterans like **Richard Loebach** skip  
the traffic jams and travel  
headaches and access big-city  
services in their own backyards



**FROM TOP:** Director Terry Gerigk Wolf; simulating a teleretinal scan at the Fayette County CBOC in Uniontown, Pa.; meeting with employees at the Beaver County CBOC in Monaca, Pa.

*To all our partners:*

Earlier this year, I hosted a series of employee appreciation events at **all five of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (otherwise known as CBOCs).**

These visits involved some serious time on the road because the clinics are scattered throughout the area (see **page 14** for detailed contact information). But each trip was well worth it; I wrapped up my tours reenergized and extremely proud of the care that we are offering Veterans in their own communities.

As you will see, my travels heavily inspired this issue's content, which aims to shine a light on our clinics and their hardworking employees. The story on **page 6**, which follows a CBOC nurse during a typical (and very busy!) morning serving Veterans, showcases just how personal and friendly VA care can be. And our cover story (**page 8**) highlights how Veterans often get the best of both worlds—small-town warmth and big-city services—in choosing a VA community clinic.

CBOCs are increasingly invaluable to our work and success at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. They help us offer convenient, stress-free primary care to our Nation's heroes. And, as you will discover in the pages to follow, all five clinics are making the most of technology to add on specialty services—everything from dermatology to treatment for insomnia—at a rapid clip.

Veterans: I hope that you enjoy this issue, and I want to end here by emphasizing that no matter where you choose to go for your VA appointments, our expert providers are committed to delivering unparalleled and compassionate care. I speak for all VAPHS employees when I say that it is—and always will be—our great honor to serve you.

**Terry Gerigk Wolf, FACHE**  
 Director and Chief Executive Officer  
 VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

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# { thebragsheet }



## Introducing Deputy Director **David Cord**

➔ The Air Force Veteran, whose VA career began in Pittsburgh, hails from Ravens country, where he recently served as the associate director for finance at VA Maryland Health Care System. **Welcome back to Pittsburgh (ahem...the City of Champions), Mr. Cord!**



## An Ovation-Worthy Honor

➔ VAPHS's very own Dr. Paul Rogers has received the 2012 **Society of Critical Care Medicine's Shubin-Weil Master Clinician/Teacher: Excellence in Bedside Training Award**.

This prestigious, peer-nominated award recognizes one doctor across the country for exceptional work in training tomorrow's medical experts.

Congratulations to Associate Director **Lovetta Ford**, whom the New Pittsburgh Courier has recognized as one of

# 50 influential African-American women

in the greater Pittsburgh area.



FORD

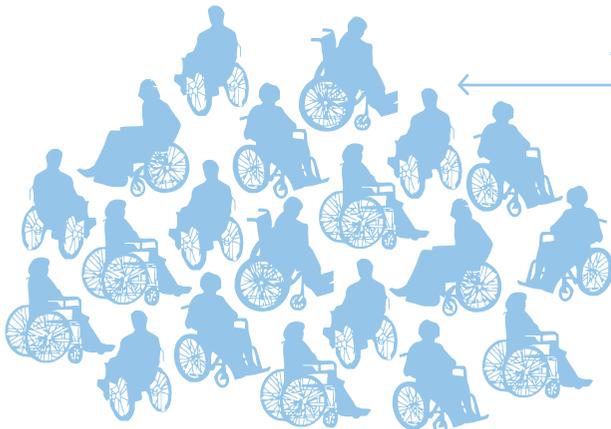
## What *Can't* Rory Cooper Do?

➔ VA Pittsburgh's very own director of the Human Engineering Research Laboratories **serves as the inspiration for Colin, a paraplegic soldier, in author Maryann McFadden's latest romance novel, *The Book Lover*.**



## A Week For the Record Books

➔ **20 ATHLETES** from the Sharpsburg, Pa.-based Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America won a record-setting **50 MEDALS** at this year's National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Richmond, Va. Way to go, team!



# { VAchatter } CONSOLIDATION

Rave reviews are rolling in for VAPHS's new

**I love the new look »  
and architectural  
design of the building  
and how it adds more  
services for Veterans  
all in one place. Over-  
all, on a scale of 1 to 10,  
I would rate it a 10!**

**Jeremy Jackson**  
Army Veteran and Purple  
Heart recipient

» I think this is one  
of the best facilities  
in the world, and  
it certainly will  
serve our Veterans  
extremely well.

**Jake Ploeger**  
Director of Corporate Business  
Development, P.J. Dick Inc.

« The story of  
this building has  
just begun.

**Michael Moreland**  
Director, VA Healthcare-VISN 4

# BUILDING BUZZ

\$77.9 million patient care facility



This building » marks a new era of VA care and the continuance of our country's commitment to caring for our Nation's heroes.

**Terry Gerigk Wolf**  
Director and CEO  
VA Pittsburgh  
Healthcare System

» It is absolutely the most up-to-date, state-of-the-art mental health facility in this country, in and outside of the VA.".

**Dr. Robert A. Petzel**  
Under Secretary  
for Health,  
Department of  
Veterans Affairs

## A NEW HOME FOR HEALING

The Consolidation Building, which opened in June 2012, integrates behavioral health and primary care services to offer Veterans the very best in compassionate, one-stop care.

The facility connects to VA Pittsburgh's long-standing tertiary care medical center at University Drive and is the culmination of two-plus years of construction where "the focus was always on safe and modest care with the utmost respect for privacy and convenience," according to Dr. Jeffrey Peters, associate chief of staff for behavioral health at VAPHS.

The project is part of a larger, multimillion-dollar construction initiative that spans both the University Drive and H.J. Heinz campuses. The final and only remaining piece of this initiative is a \$27.6 million research office building, which is currently under construction at University Drive.

« We look forward to hearing about all of the miracles that are about to happen in this place.

**Timothy Powers**  
President of Architecture  
Astorino

### WHAT'S INSIDE

**FLOOR 1** Outpatient behavioral health clinics and primary care rooms

**FLOOR 2** Audiology, speech pathology, a chapel, public affairs, library and education

**FLOORS 3 4, AND 5:** Distinct day and night wings with 78 inpatient behavioral health suites, multipurpose activity areas and three outdoor plazas

# { VAfieldnotes } ON THE

**W**hile juggling a packed schedule at the Fayette County Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Uniontown, Pa., nurse **Joyce Thornton** stands apart—and makes medicine personal again—by taking time to connect with each Veteran she serves.

**8:25 TO 8:33 A.M.** Thornton, beaming, escorts her first patient to his exam room before returning to her desk to scan seven pages of appointments—her tentative schedule for the day.

**8:40 A.M.** “He always brings us candy,” says Thornton of her next patient, serial jokester and Army Veteran Sam Vidnjvich, whom she preps for his visit with the podiatrist. Today’s treat? Bazooka bubble gum.

**9:05 TO 9:15 A.M.** Thornton ushers Vivian Louise Fisher into her exam room for her women’s health checkup, then waves hello to Mary Suhevits, who’s just had her blood drawn at the clinic’s lab. Seemingly every encounter sparks a personal anecdote. This time, it’s: “Mary works in a prison. She lives on a farm and brings us brown eggs.”

**9:21 A.M.** A shipment of 19 shingles vaccines arrives, and Thornton tears into the box to check that her order, which she places once a month, is complete.

**9:26 A.M.** She informs Donald Miller—who’s dressed in blue plaid for an afternoon of golf—that it is time for his shingles shot. “They tell me I have a soft touch, so it shouldn’t affect your swing,” she says, smiling. Miller responds with an enthusiastic “Hot dog!”



**“Joyce is a good woman....  
I can talk to her when  
I’ve got troubles”  
-ARMY VETERAN WILLIAM CHAPPELL**



# CLOCK

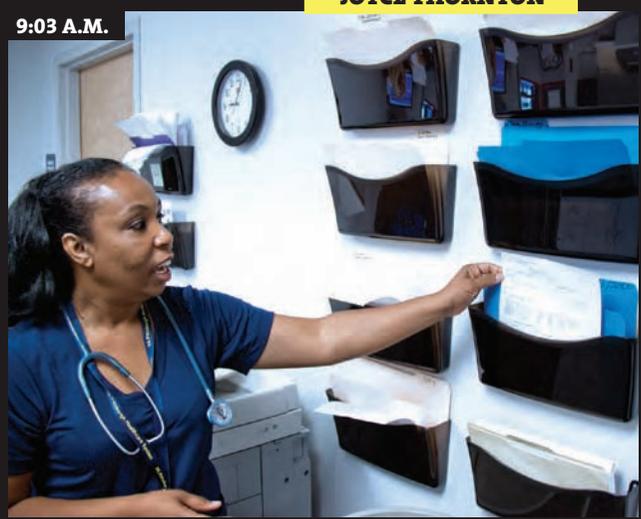


**JOYCE THORNTON**

**Veterans First spends a busy morning following a nurse who aims to squeeze the most out of every minute**



**9:03 A.M.**



**9:36 TO 10:33 A.M.** After stopping at the nurse's station to update patient records, Thornton circles back to assist with Fisher's checkup. Next comes a flurry of podiatry and primary care visits and more shingles shots.

**10:44 A.M.** Thornton helps a colleague with a finger prick to test the clotting ability of William Chappell's blood. "Joyce is a good woman," the Army Veteran says. "I can talk to her when I've got troubles."



**9:27 A.M.**



**11:04 A.M.** In the hallway, Grayling Sanders passes Thornton, who's off to give yet another shingles shot. "Joyce...me and her frequent church together sometimes," says the Navy Veteran. "It's nice seeing familiar faces when I come here."

**11:24 A.M.** Edward Russell—who is in for a routine primary care visit—is hard of hearing, so Thornton raises her voice to ask if anything is bothering him. "I get headaches. Migraines. What can you do? Suffer. Take a pill," he says matter-of-factly. "I don't want to see you suffer," says Thornton, her voice suddenly quiet.



**11:41 A.M.**



**11:40 TO 11:48 A.M.** Lawrence Swift arrives three hours before his scheduled shingles shot, and Thornton happily accommodates him, then helps a colleague with another finger prick.

**11:59 A.M.** Thornton sits down at her computer to catch her breath and check out her last patient before lunch. "Almost there," she says aloud and to no one in particular. Soon enough, though, she will be revving up her smile, tightening the laces on her Nike Shox tennis shoes and diving into the day once again.. 

{ coverstory }

 VA PRIMARY CARE

# SMALL-TOWN SERVICE.

How one Veteran's world changed—for the better—thanks to an easy and



The image shows the exterior of a VA outpatient clinic building. The building has a light-colored facade with large windows and a dark blue awning over the entrance. The words "RE CENTER" are visible in large, blue, 3D letters on the wall. A person is seen walking through the glass entrance doors. In the foreground, there is a small tree and a concrete walkway with a yellow curb.

RE CENTER

# BIG-CITY CARE.

innovative program at his local VA outpatient clinic BY BETHANY MIGA

**R**ichard “Hulk” Loebach, at 275 pounds and a commanding 6 feet 5 inches tall *without* the motorcycle boots on, hates needles.

Really hates them.

“I am not joking,” says the Vietnam Veteran who, at 65, still rocks a full beard, stud in his left ear and leather biker vest with a pin that reads *These are my church clothes*.

“It happened over in ‘Nam. I came down with malaria, and I’m a hard hit. They couldn’t find my veins.”

That experience, which Loebach says “left my arms black and blue,” resurfaced with a vengeance in the spring of 2012 when the Navy Veteran was visiting VA Pittsburgh’s Westmoreland Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Greensburg, Pa. His doctor, Gary Taylor, was reviewing the retired machinist’s blood work when he uttered one simple—and to Loebach, terrifying—word. >>

# { coverstory }

“Insulin,” recalls the Veteran, a diabetic. “He gave me an ultimatum: Clean up my lifestyle or start insulin shots. Very few things frighten me, but that talk—and the thought of pushing a needle in my stomach—was enough.”

Suddenly, the man whose standing order at Eat’n Park was “eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes—the whole works” was faced with the daunting task of rethinking his lifelong food choices.

To help Loebach wrap his head around the transition, “I suggested that he try a new service of ours called telediabetes,” says Taylor.

The clinic’s telediabetes program is so new, in fact, that the Jeannette, Pa., resident became the first-ever patient to enroll. The service, which utilizes technology to loop in medical experts at VA Pittsburgh’s flagship facility at University Drive, is part of an ongoing push to make health care increasingly accessible and easy for Veterans.

“The thing is, we are 40 miles from Pittsburgh,” says Taylor. “We often get people—Mr. Loebach was one of them—who decline care because they want to avoid the city at all costs. Telediabetes and other telehealth programs have opened doors for us and, more importantly, opened doors for the Veterans we serve.” >>

“He gave me an ultimatum: Clean up my lifestyle or start insulin shots. Very few things frighten me, but that talk—and the thought of pushing a needle in my stomach—was enough.”

—RICHARD LOEBACH



## THE WONDERS OF TELEHEALTH

These tech-savvy programs are helping Veterans receive top-notch specialty care without the hassles and headaches of traveling to Pittsburgh

### TELERETINAL

Clinic staff scan a patient’s retina and then forward the images to a VA ophthalmologist in Pittsburgh for review. This type of exam is particularly useful for diabetes patients, whose eyes are at greater risk of suffering a ruptured blood vessel.

### TELEDIABETES

A Pittsburgh-based team of diabetes experts meets with patients at community-based outpatient clinics via cameras connected to televisions. The goal of these one-time, three-hour sessions is to help Veterans better understand how their lifestyle choices can impact diabetes-related symptoms and outcomes.

### TELEDERMATOLOGY

Clinic staff use a special camera to take photographs of the skin and then forward the images to a VA dermatologist in Pittsburgh. Oftentimes, the dermatologist can make a diagnosis or offer guidance without the Veteran needing to travel to University Drive for a face-to-face exam.

### TELEMENTAL HEALTH

A VA psychologist, psychiatrist or nurse practitioner in Pittsburgh meets virtually with a Veteran or a group of Veterans based at a clinic. During the session, Veterans can discuss behavioral health concerns such as medication needs, smoking cessation, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse issues.



"I don't know where else patients would get this type of attention," says Taylor, the clinic's medical director, with Loebach.

### TELESPEECH

Aided by cameras connected to computers and televisions, a VA speech pathologist in Pittsburgh examines Veterans who are struggling with speech, language, cognitive or swallowing issues.

### TELEPALLIATIVE CARE

Using cameras connected to televisions and computers, a VA physician in Pittsburgh offers comprehensive symptom management to clinic-based Veterans coping with a terminal illness.

### TELEREHAB

Coming soon to all clinics! Clinic staff use cameras to send real-time images of broken or misaligned wheelchairs and walkers to VA rehabilitation experts in Pittsburgh. If the fix is simple, such as a minor equipment tweak or replacement order, Veterans may be able to skip a trip to Pittsburgh.

### SCAN-ECHO CONSULTS

These doctor-to-doctor sessions, conducted via cameras embedded in computers, connect outpatient clinic staff with a VA anesthesiologist in Pittsburgh. As a result, primary care physicians at the clinics can offer a wider range of pain management options to Veterans in need.

# { coverstory }

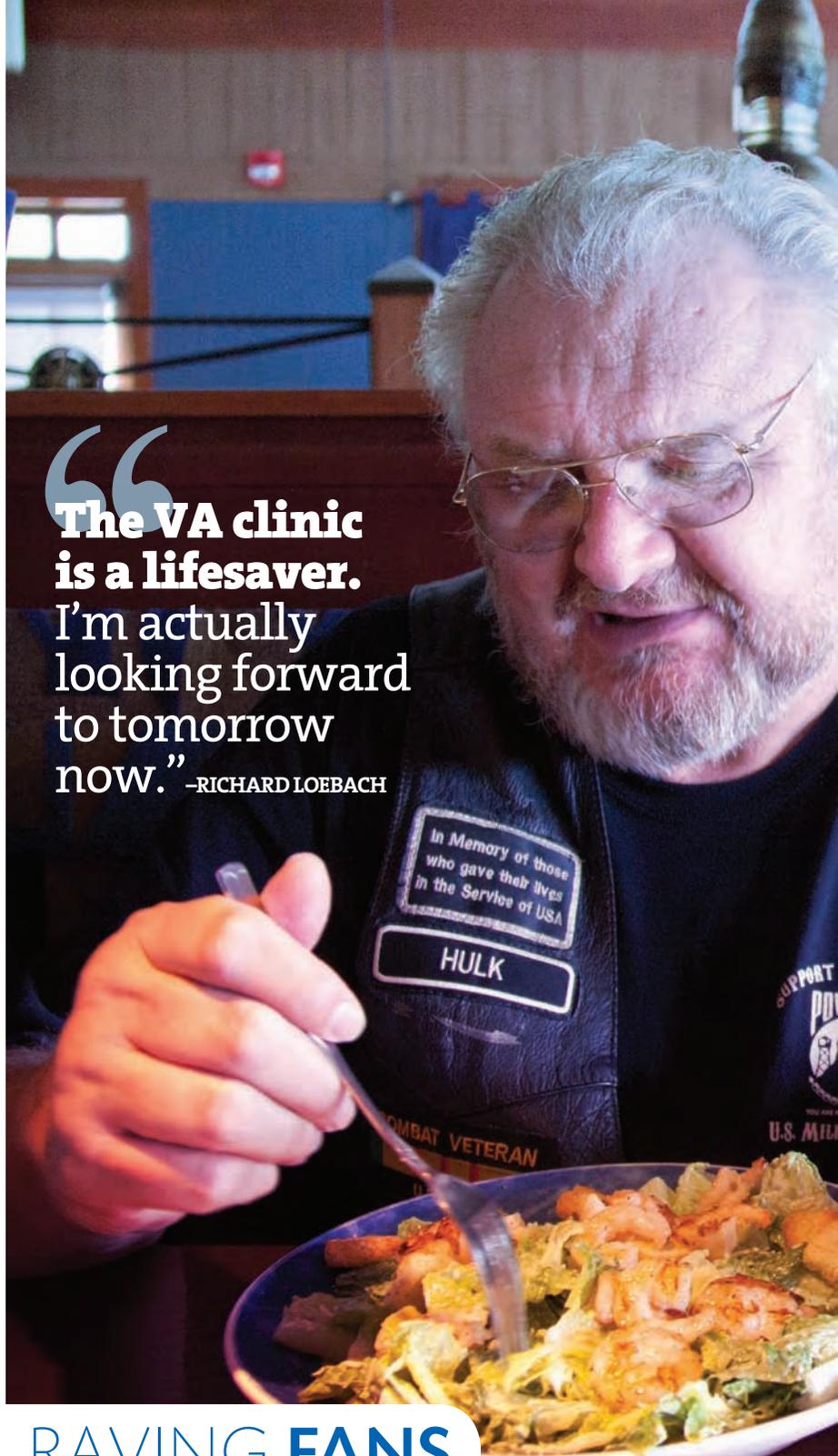
For his part in the program, Loebach simply blocked out three hours of his afternoon, drove his Harley to his regular outpatient clinic 15 minutes from home, and met—via television—with two diabetes experts based in Pittsburgh.

“I sat at a table and had plenty of breaks. It was just me, and I had this booklet that we went through, page by page. I took notes, asked questions, and it was all very relaxed,” says Loebach, who admits that he was initially skeptical about the lifestyle switch. “I left that day feeling really good, like I could work through everything.”

Today, the Veteran has shed 25 pounds. He orders salads at restaurants and packs healthier snacks—cheese crackers—to munch on during long bike trips. But the best part? Insulin is no longer a looming threat.

“The VA clinic is a lifesaver,” according to Loebach, his rough-and-tumble face breaking into a full smile. “I’m actually looking forward to tomorrow now.” 🇺🇸

Clinic dietician Jennifer Weyandt meets with Loebach to review what he learned at the telediabetes session.



“**The VA clinic is a lifesaver. I’m actually looking forward to tomorrow now.**” —RICHARD LOEBACH

## RAVING FANS

Veterans and employees share what they love about



**“I’m a big advocate for VA clinics. I’ll tell you why: accessibility, always available, excellent**

**doctors and excellent nurses. You can’t really go wrong.”**

Army Veteran **Donald Miller**, Fayette clinic



**“It’s convenient. It’s only a 7- to 10- minute drive. I could walk here,**

**but I’m not always in the walking mood!”**

Army Veteran **John Panella**, Fayette clinic



The Veteran enjoys a salad—and picks around the croutons—at Red Lobster in Greensburg, Pa.

## VAPHS's community based outpatient clinics



**"I love that the outpatient clinics are smaller, so it is easier to get to know patients and staff by first names."**

Dietician **Rachel Ainsley**, Washington and Fayette clinics



**"We may be a small-town clinic, but we are big on personal service. We're located by a grocery store, and I take my patients there for individual consultations. This extra effort means that they really learn how to make healthier choices stick."**

Dietician **Shelly Harr**, Belmont clinic



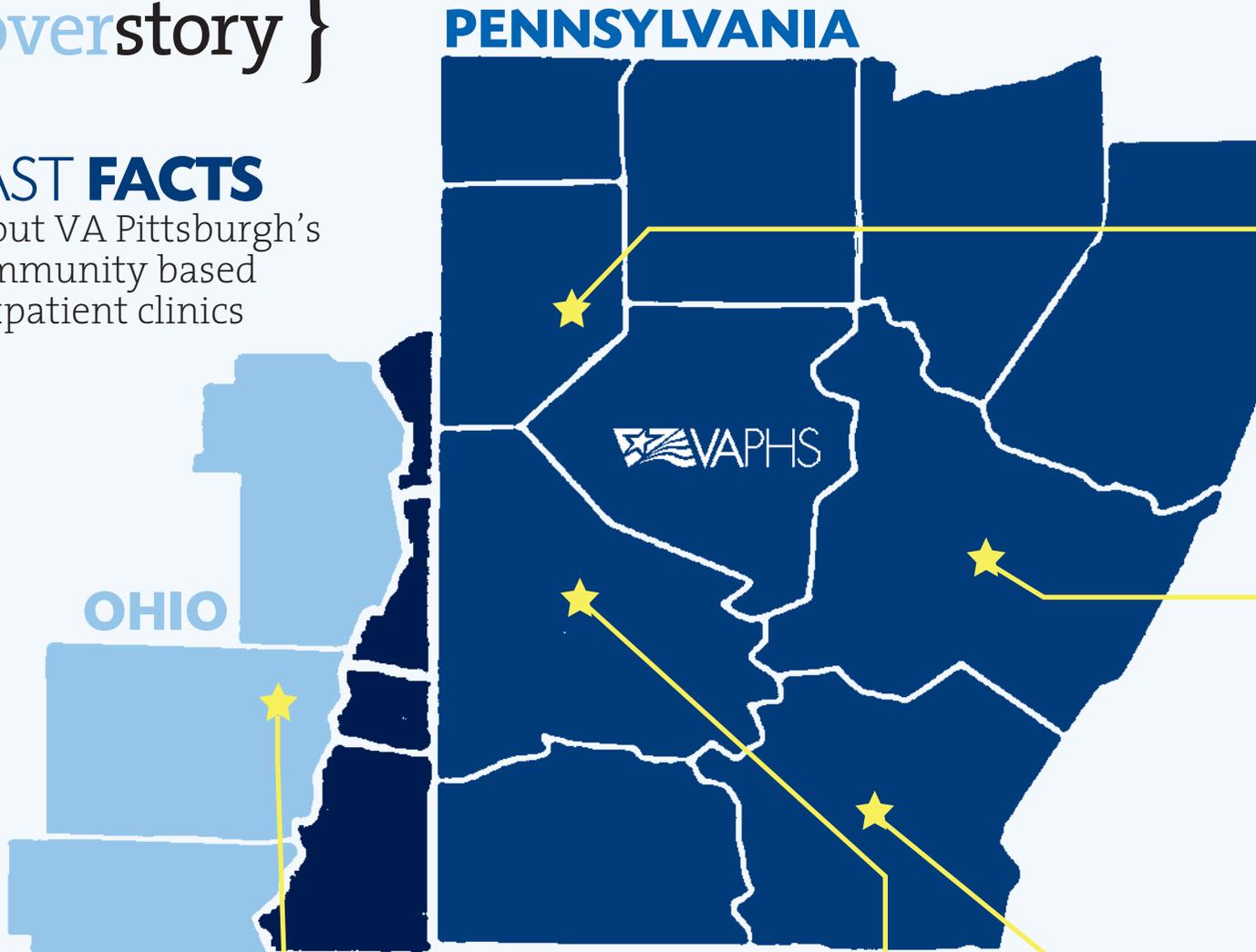
**"They treat you as a person here—not a number—and all of the Veterans walk out with smiles."**

Air Force Veteran **Adam Yonitch Jr.**, Westmoreland clinic

# { coverstory }

## FAST FACTS

about VA Pittsburgh's  
community based  
outpatient clinics



### Belmont County Clinic

103 Plaza Drive, Suite A  
St. Clairsville, OH 43950  
740-695-9321 or 1-877-434-2721

**24** full-time employees / **5,415** Veterans served in 2011 / **23,403** outpatient visits in 2011 / **72 miles**—a 90-minute drive—from the University Drive campus



### Washington County Clinic

Washington Crown Center Mall, Room 450  
1500 West Chestnut Street  
Washington, PA 15301  
724-250-7790

**26** full-time employees / **4,726** Veterans served in 2011 / **17,587** outpatient visits in 2011 / **33 miles**—a 45-minute drive—from the University Drive campus



### Beaver County Clinic

90 Wagner Road  
Monaca, PA 15061  
724-709-6005

15 full-time employees / 4,651 Veterans served in 2011 / 20,075 outpatient visits in 2011 / 37 miles—a 45-minute drive—from the University Drive campus



### Westmoreland County Clinic

Westmoreland Mall Plaza  
5274 State Route 30, Suite 10  
Greensburg, PA 15601  
724-216-0317

21 full-time employees / 7,010 Veterans served in 2011 / 28,273 outpatient visits in 2011 / 37 miles—a 60-minute drive—from the University Drive campus



### Fayette County Clinic

635 Pittsburgh Road, Suite 520  
Uniontown, PA 15401  
724-439-4990

19 full-time employees / 2,678 Veterans served in 2011 / 13,897 outpatient visits in 2011 / 52 miles—an 80-minute drive—from the University Drive campus

All five clinics provide many of the same exceptional services offered at VA Pittsburgh's main campuses in the city, including:

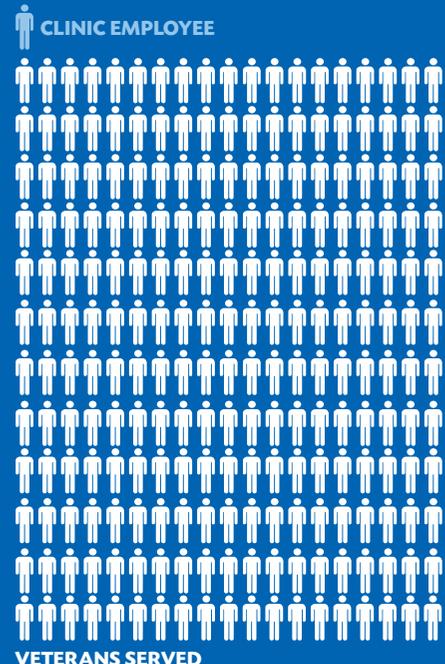
- Primary care
- Podiatry
- Behavioral health
- Dietary and nutrition counseling
- Telehealth
- Laboratory work
- X-rays

## THE UNSUNG WORKHORSES OF VAPHS

They may be small in staff count, but VA Pittsburgh's community clinics churned out some serious statistics in terms of primary care outpatients served in 2011.

Staffed by 105 full-time employees, the clinics served a combined 23,936 Veterans.

RATIO OF EMPLOYEES TO VETERANS SERVED: 1 to 228



# { have you heard? }



New Hire:  
**VAPHS  
EDUCATION**

## New Employee Orientation

Please give a warm welcome to two surprising new additions to our VAPHS family

**SimMan 3G** is an educational mannequin that helps train our clinical community by simulating cardiac, airway and pulse-related complications at the touch of a button.

**Officer Honz** is a bomb-sniffing, badge-carrying German Shepherd who is training to work alongside VA Police Sgt. Chuck Hartman and detect chemicals at all three VAPHS campuses.



New Hire:  
**VAPHS  
POLICE**

## Coming Soon to VAPHS

### MyHome at H.J. Heinz

A groundbreaking therapy system that is turning heads in the world of rehabilitative care. Slated to open in September 2012, MyHome will enable Veterans to master functional tasks such as folding laundry, fetching the mail and unloading groceries from a car parked in the home's garage.

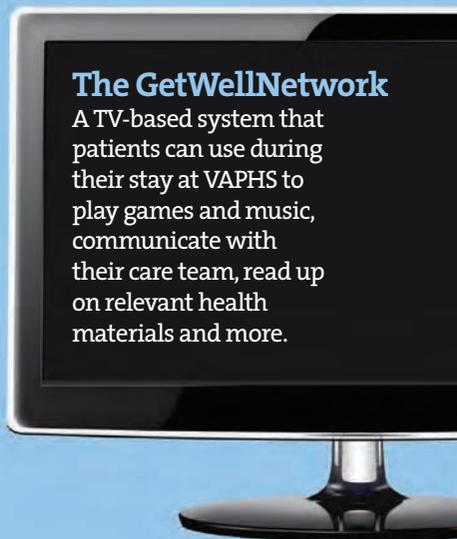


### Fisher House at University Drive

A 10-suite residence, scheduled to open in late 2012, that families can call home while their loved ones receive care at VA Pittsburgh.

### The GetWellNetwork

A TV-based system that patients can use during their stay at VAPHS to play games and music, communicate with their care team, read up on relevant health materials and more.



## VETERANS FIRST

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## We'd Like to Hear From You

*Veterans First* serves the patients, volunteers, employees and friends VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. To learn more about this magazine, contact us at **412-822-3533** or [bethany.miga@va.gov](mailto:bethany.miga@va.gov).

 **VAPHS**  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System