

WORKING { SPRING 2010 } TOGETHER

PARTNERING IN VETERAN-CENTERED CARE

homeless

How VA Pittsburgh helped four
Veterans find their way home (bumpy
road included; dreams intact)

VAPHS helped Mike Frisby
go from homeless to college
student in two years.



Mrs. Wolf chats with Veteran June Stokes at the soda shop in the Heinz division.

To all our partners:

Every day, I hear stories. All kinds of stories. Many are inspiring. Some are small yet satisfying. Others are amazing and almost larger than life. These stories come from everywhere—from Veterans, volunteers, visitors and employees. I love to hear, direct from the source, the inspiring words of our VAPHS community.

Thanks to this publication, you can do the same. Flip this page, and you will find a Veteran recalling a run-in with an esteemed visitor at Arlington Cemetery and a spotlight on our newest leadership hire, Jack Ferko, vice president of geriatrics. In the issue's "My VA" section, Chief Biomedical Engineer Prachi Asher introduces us to the health care system's world of high-tech machinery. Last but not least is the magazine's cover piece, which speaks to Secretary Eric Shinseki's goal to end homelessness among Veterans within five years. In this story, four formerly homeless Veterans recall, in their own words, how VA Pittsburgh helped them bounce back—and put their dreams into motion again.

There are, of course, too many incredible stories to fit within these 16 pages. But, my ears are always open. I am forever collecting them. I hope you are, too.

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

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{ thebragsheet }

Find out who is making news at VA Pittsburgh

\$26,428

Amount employees donated to the **National Veterans Wheelchair Games** through the combined federal campaign in 2009.

2 Reasons to Cheer



no.1

In the past four combined federal campaigns, VAPHS and VISN 4 staff contributed \$244,867.81 to help bring a Fisher House to VA Pittsburgh.

no.2

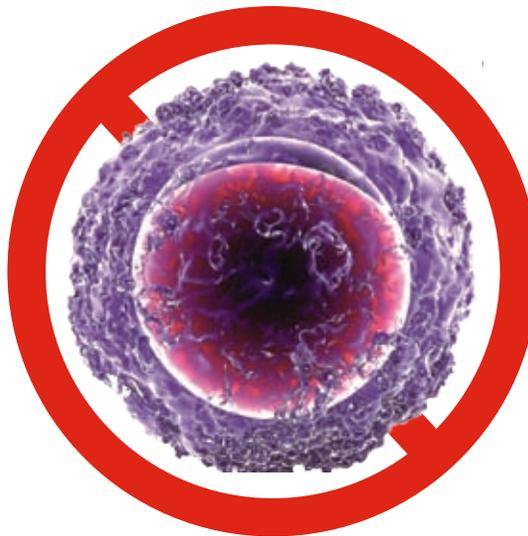
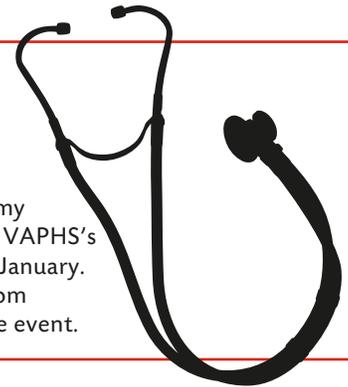
Construction on the Fisher House—which will accommodate nine families of Veterans who travel to Pittsburgh to receive extensive care—will start this summer and wrap up in 2011. “We are very excited about breaking ground at University Drive,” says social worker and Fisher House liaison Lisa Fitzsimmons. “The house will provide support vital to a Veteran’s recovery and well-being.”



Health Check for New Vets Yields Big Numbers

287

members of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard’s 56th Stryker Brigade attended VAPHS’s **Post-Deployment Health Reassessment** in January. All of these Veterans, who recently returned from combat in Iraq, enrolled in VA health care at the event.



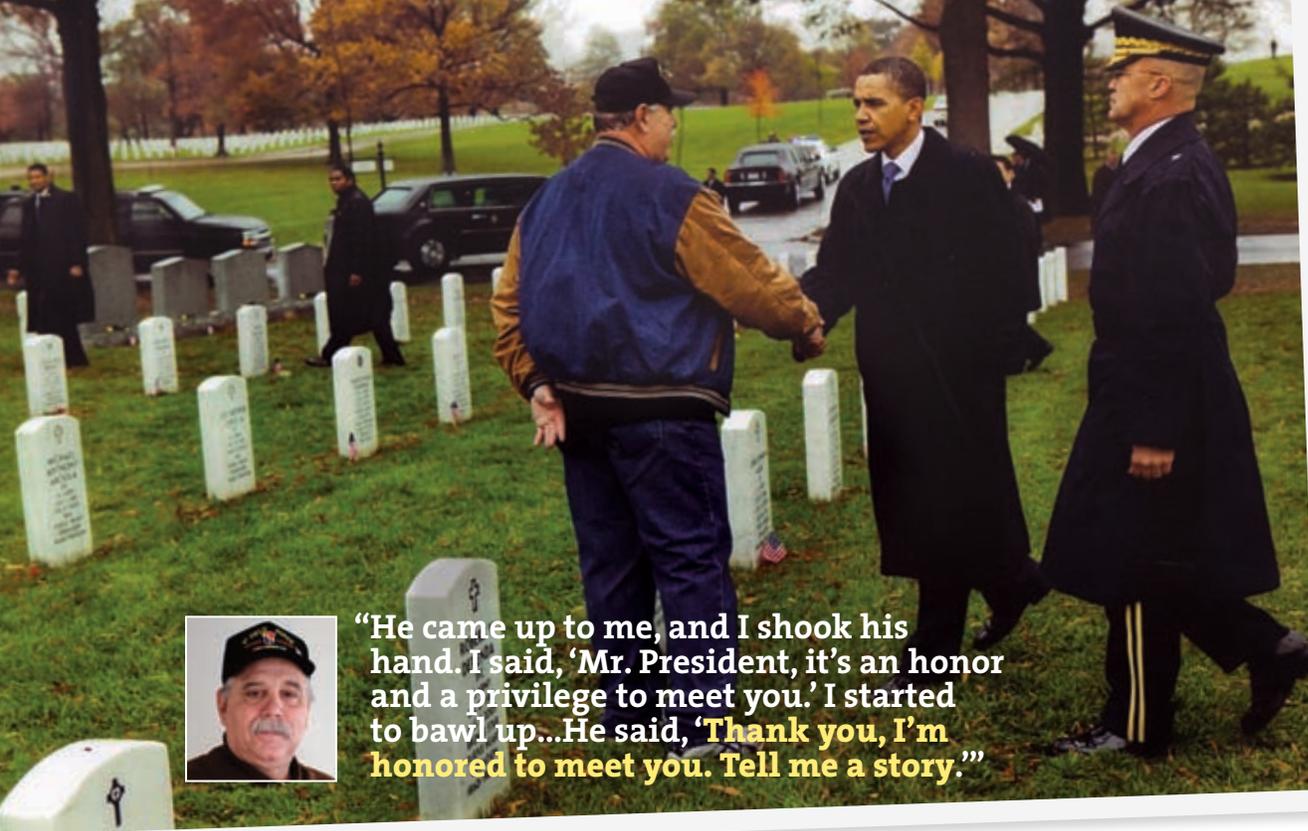
Still Leading the way in MRSA Prevention

VA Pittsburgh’s surgical intensive care unit has *not* been the source of a hospital-acquired methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection for 17 months and counting. Keep up the great work!

Volunteers Celebrate Veterans

Each year, the **National Salute to Veterans** event encourages neighbors to get involved and learn more about volunteering at the VA. This year, local musicians, University of Pittsburgh cheerleaders and David Newell (Mr. McFeely from “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood”) were among the many volunteers to help bring smiles to Veterans’ faces throughout the three-day event. “The music was really great,” recalls Veteran John Trosiek, 64, from Holland, Pa., of the festivities. “This is a beautiful place with beautiful people who have taken really good care of me.”





“He came up to me, and I shook his hand. I said, ‘Mr. President, it’s an honor and a privilege to meet you.’ I started to bawl up...He said, **‘Thank you, I’m honored to meet you. Tell me a story.’**”

{ VAmoment }

Presidential Encounter

A local Veteran recalls his chance meeting with the commander in chief at Virginia’s Arlington Cemetery

Every year on Veterans Day, John Santoriello, 58, travels to Arlington Cemetery with his Veterans of Foreign Wars post and pays his respects to his nephew, Lt. Neil Anthony Santoriello, who was killed in Iraq in 2004. Last fall, this routine trip connected

the Vietnam Veteran with some pretty famous company—President Barack Obama and the first lady. The White House press office captured the moment on camera and sent Santoriello, a former Army mine-sweeper, this photo as a keepsake.

{ meetthestaff }



For Jack Ferko, there’s no such thing as a typical day, and that’s just the way he likes it. The new vice president of geriatrics and extended care, who oversees the community living center at Heinz, joined VA Pittsburgh in October and has quickly taken to his multifaceted role.

Fresh Perspective
Ferko has worked for various for-profit and nonprofit hospitals in the state—most recently as executive director of Presbyterian SeniorCare in Washington, Pa. “I’m kind of the outsider. Most of the leadership has been with the VA for a long time, so what I bring is a community and private-sector perspective.”

On the Home Front
The Pennsylvania native and his siblings help care for their parents, both in their 80s, doing household chores and yard work, among other things. “I oftentimes handle concerns of residents at Heinz from the perspective of *what would I do if this was one of my parents,*” he says.

Up for Adventure
Outside work, Ferko enjoys jogging and biking, and has sought his fair share of adventure abroad, too. He and son Brian, the eldest of three, have lived on a riverboat in the Peruvian Amazon, hiked the rain forests of Costa Rica and camped on the national park island Isle Royale in Lake Superior.

Aiming High
Ferko wants VAPHS’s community living center to become a VA-wide leader in “quality clinical outcomes,” as well as resident and employee satisfaction. “Our staff is dedicated to giving Veterans the very best; we always look forward to meeting and exceeding our customers’ expectations.”

{ VA accolades }



Director Wolf with her Communications Visionary Award.

A LEADER WHO LISTENS

Director Terry Gerigk Wolf, the Veterans Health Administration's Communications Visionary Award Winner of the Year, is serious about sparking conversation. In addition to authoring the first-ever VA blog and hosting frequent round table and focus group discussions, Wolf regularly answers message board questions posed by staff throughout the health care system. Read on for a few examples of how this last tool—her message board—has prompted significant changes at VA Pittsburgh.

CONCERN

PROBLEM SOLVED

The Heinz chapel is beautiful but the stacks of pews were designed for ambulatory people. Can some of the pews be shortened so that there can be pockets of seating space for persons who use wheelchairs?

VA Pittsburgh modified the seating arrangement in Heinz chapel to accommodate more wheelchair users.

I have a suggestion regarding the shuttles that run between the facilities. While I appreciate the fact that these vehicles are named "red," "white" and "blue," these terms are rarely indicative of the actual vehicle being used. For example, the vehicle called the "RED SHUTTLE" is actually a blue bus... I believe it would be much easier and much less confusing to everyone if the shuttles indicated their destination, rather than a color.

In response to this question, VA Pittsburgh dropped the color-driven system and renamed all three shuttles according to their routes. An art designer created new magnetic signs for the shuttles to reflect these changes.

Would it be possible for some type of benches to be placed near the PAT bus stop on the first floor level of the parking garage?...The Veterans at the PAT bus stop are often elderly, and it would be easier to wait if they could sit.

Thanks to this suggestion, VA Pittsburgh workers added two wooden benches for Veterans and family members to use while waiting at the bus stop near University Drive's first-floor entrance.

I was privileged to visit Hoptel for a few minutes this evening. What a nice group of Veterans are assembled there. Apparently coffee is made once a day in the a.m. That's it; no more. There was also a tea drinker present who questioned the absence of tea bags...These are their concerns, and I have passed them on as they requested.

VA Pittsburgh now provides complimentary tea bags and instant coffee throughout the day (and night!) to Hoptel guests. Voluntary Services also frequently offers snacks and cards crafted by local school children to the Hoptel's Veteran visitors.

facebook }

Director Terry Gerigk Wolf is now on Facebook. Check out what she has to say—and join in on the fun—by becoming her fan on Facebook today!



Celebrating the voices of VAPHS Veterans and staff

ENGINEERING BETTER HEALTH

Prachi Asher and her team work to ensure that VA Pittsburgh's many medical technologies run smoothly and Veterans get the very best in cutting-edge care

AS VA PITTSBURGH'S CHIEF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEER, Prachi Asher guards an empire—an ever-growing, complex web of machinery, gadgets and devices that help doctors and their medical teams diagnose and treat Veterans. “We are the gatekeepers,” says Asher of her 18-person team of technicians and engineers based at University Drive. “We keep our existing system alive and well.”

Under Asher's direction, the empire—and her crew's role in it—have expanded. “Previously, we were solely service maintenance, calibration... fixing broken things,” says Asher, who came to VA Pittsburgh from the Cincinnati VA more than one year ago. “But now our roles are morphing into technology planning. Our job is to stop the hospital from becoming this dotted cluster of systems and to really make everything work together.”

Today, the technicians and engineers seem to keep fairly busy connecting those dots. In addition to examining how different departments, such as

cardiology and radiology, can share the same space and tools, Asher's team also evaluates how new technologies can fit within the health care system's existing framework.

Other items on the group's to-do list include placing physician's orders for new equipment (see sidebar for recent examples) and managing VA Pittsburgh's massive stream of medical data.

The health care system's web of technology—despite its increasing complexity—serves one very simple function: to help Veterans. Asher and her team do not take this responsibility lightly. “We are public stewards,” she says. “We help our staff give Veterans the very best in medical care and, at the same time, we enable patients to get answers—and get healthy—in less time and with less stress.”

“We're not worrying about quarterly end profits...We have the luxury of actually doing the right thing,” Asher adds. “At the end of the day, it makes me feel really good.” 



TECHNOLOGY PRIMER

Here is a quick look at some of the machines in VA Pittsburgh's impressive medical arsenal

Asher in the cardiac catheterization laboratory.



SmartSponge System
Ensures that medical teams keep track of surgical sponges during surgery.



Sensei X Robotic Catheter System
Enables surgeons to remotely place catheters in patients' hearts using 3-D imaging.



ONI MSK Extreme
Allows patients to sit up during magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) by focusing on extremities rather than the standard full-body scan.



da Vinci Surgical System
Combines a surgeon's skill with a steady robotic hand, reducing the tremors prone to a human counterpart.



Coming later this year—a second da Vinci system!

{ coverstory }



sweet SUCCESS

Four formerly homeless Veterans tell how VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System helped them get their lives—and their dreams—back on track



Ray Webb

Ray Webb has lived at VAPHS's Veterans Recovery Center twice: once nearly a decade ago, while combating his alcohol and drug addictions and again, in 2003, after the former Army tank commander found himself homeless and unemployed. Now, the recently married Webb, 50, helps homeless Veterans fight the same battles he won years before. He works as night supervisor at Pittsburgh's Shepherd's Heart Veteran's Home, which provides transitional housing to men seeking another chance at life. Webb shared his story with *Working Together's* Arin Gencer.

When I joined the Army in 1979, I was stationed at Fort Stewart in Georgia, then Germany. That's pretty much where my drinking problem started. Drinking led to drugs—first it was hash, and it got worse from there.

In November 2000, I had gone on a get-high spree and landed in McKeesport Hospital. My vitals were off the hook, and they said, 'You're supposed to be dead.'

The day I was discharged, a social worker said, 'We're going to send you to the VA.' They put me in a cab and told the driver, 'Don't stop'.

I did the Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders program and stayed at the Veterans Recovery Center (see box) for five months.

In 2003, I had arm surgery and ended up hospitalized for several weeks. My medical leave was up, and everything just started unraveling. I ended up living on the street in 'abandoniums.' I spent almost eight months homeless. It was not pleasant, but I had too much pride to say anything about it.

Still, this whole time, I was connected with the VA. Jean

McDonough, a now-retired social services assistant, sensed that something was wrong. Then Gary Glacken, who manages the Veterans Recovery Center, gave me the opportunity to stay there...again.

It was a relief having a place to stay. It was great being able to have three meals a day, to take a shower and to be able to talk to people when something was going on. It gave me hope. They helped me tremendously. They helped save my life, no doubt.

One day, Mary Frances Pilarski, who leads a support program for homeless Veterans, was looking for volunteers to help out at the city's severe weather shelter.

I signed up. I enjoyed it so much that I kept doing it. I had also been driving the homeless to Shepherd's Heart and ended up getting a job there. I've been there since we opened in May 2007.

It's about giving back. I love seeing a person get off the street. I've been there. I know exactly what they're going through. I'm always going to work with the Vets and the homeless—always.

spotlight on THE VETERANS RECOVERY CENTER

The Veterans Recovery Center is a 50-bed residential treatment program that serves about 200 homeless Veterans every year.

A staff of 20—including social workers, nurses, a psychologist and a vocational rehab counselor—work together to help residents find jobs and a stable, safe place to live in the community.



Joyce "Maci" Maciak

Joyce "Maci" Maciak has suffered—and overcome—severe addictions to alcohol and drugs. Today, she is a state-certified peer specialist and a full-time student at the Community College of Allegheny County with hopes of one day working as an addiction counselor. Below, the Air Force Veteran, 51, tells *Working Together's* Shelley Nulph how she found the courage to stop abusing and start living.

I joined the military because I wanted a fresh start. I loved it. I would have been a lifer, but then something happened to change my life. It was a turning point, and it was a downhill road from there.

I remember crawling into my bedroom and finding a bottle that my ex-roommate had left. I polished it off and never quit drinking until after I got out of prison in 1984. I went through treatment programs when I was in the military, but I never could get clean.

I had periods of sober times but basically self-medicated. I always held at least one job, and then I got busted with a drug charge on June 10, 2003. At that time, I couldn't take care of myself. I didn't know if I was coming or I was going. The whole ball of wax.

I had to go to the VA. I was court-ordered. The VA had this little 14-day thing through its Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders (or CTAD; see box). I was only intending to do the 14 days and get the heck

out of dodge...but it didn't work out that way.

At CTAD, they've got some really caring people, and they made it possible for me to stay clean when I was going through my hardest times. Sandy Rudert—a nurse in the program—said to me, 'Why don't you just take a chance? Do something different and let someone else help guide you for a little while.' I took her advice.

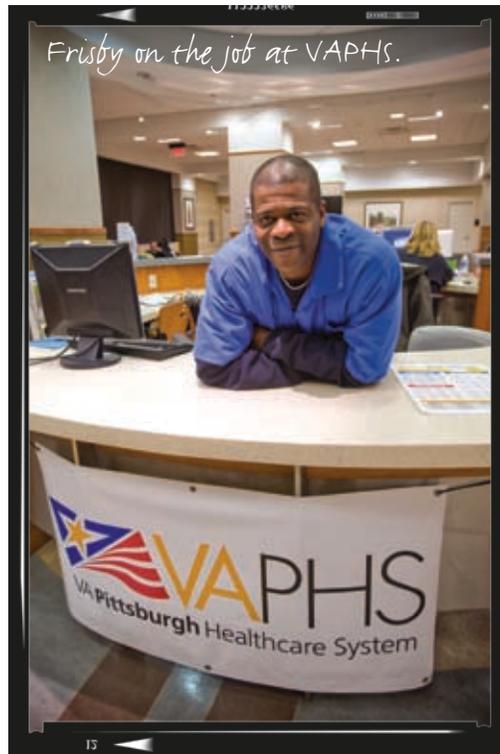
My downhill slide suddenly took an upturn.

Today, it feels great to spend time with my granddaugh-

ter—she makes clean and sober fun. I'm also trying to pay this forward. A lot of people have done a lot to help me along this journey. So, I'm going to college to earn my substance abuse certification and get a degree in social work. I volunteer with several Veterans groups, and I want to continue working with Veterans. It helps. I don't want to see anyone go down the road that I went. It was a hard road. But I'm still on it—and I'm moving forward—and that feels really good.

spotlight on CTAD

CTAD aims to provide comprehensive care for Veterans with a wide variety of substance use questions and concerns. Individuals with severe substance use addictions, like Joyce Maciak, can participate in one of CTAD's intensive 14 to 21-day inpatient rehabilitation programs followed by specialized outpatient aftercare and recovery clinics. Maciak found her Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor and close network of supportive friends in an aftercare group therapy setting.



Mike Frisby

Six years ago, an unemployed and struggling Michael Frisby left his girlfriend and their two children and bought a one-way bus ticket to VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. In that instant, his life narrowed to one gym bag, one suit case and a leap of faith. Today, the Navy Veteran, 43, spends his days working as a nursing assistant and escort at VAPHS's University Drive division and his nights attending classes at the University of Pittsburgh. His end goal? A master's degree in social work. Frisby sat down with *Working Together's* Bethany Miga to tell his story.

I loved my children, but it wasn't working with my significant other at the time. I wasn't in a good place. I didn't know what was going to happen, but I left and I left her with everything.

Right away, there was a group of people at the VA that welcomed me. I teamed up with a social worker by the name of Sam Saccamango. He is deceased now, but he became my mentor and even my friend, and he helped me greatly. I went from a lot of negativity to something very positive within the VA system.

After five months in the Veterans Recovery Center, I started Compensated Work Therapy (see box). This helped catapult me back into the work force. I learned a ton of different coping skills for the workplace. At first I worked at a printing company. Then Goodwill Industries. Then I went to the Heroes Hall escort division at University Drive.

Here, I got to network with people and some doors opened. When the assignment ended, I applied for a position at VA Pittsburgh, and I got hired as a full-time employee in October 2006.

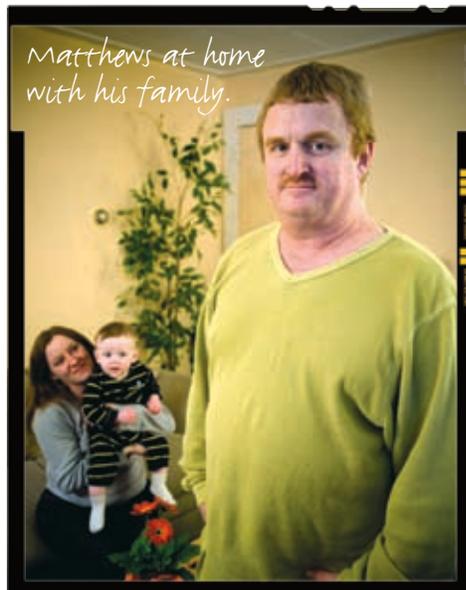
Working for the VA is incredible. It's been like a dream. I am in a very healthy relationship now and my relationship with my kids is a lot healthier, too.

I'm also at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work, and I'm pursuing my master's. I am a full-time student, and I've received tons of help from the VA. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it exactly the same way.

Sam always encouraged me to do better. He mapped out his whole journey, and it's the journey I'm taking now. He is one of the people that I wanted at my graduation. But he will be there. He will. I know it. I am proud to follow in his footsteps.

spotlight on COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY

Compensated Work Therapy provides employment opportunities for Veterans and is comprised of two sub-programs: Transitional Work Experience (TWE) and Supported Employment. Frisby participated in TWE, which places Veterans in a therapeutic work environment while they receive minimum wage and establish an employment history. TWE's annual payroll is nearly half a million dollars, and Veterans spend an average of three to six months in work therapy.



Jon Matthews

One year ago, Jon Matthews hit a low point sitting in a jail cell after being arrested—his third offense in a month—for public intoxication. The Army Veteran was homeless and jobless, and he knew he needed help. Today, thanks to a unique partnership between VAPHS and The American Legion, Matthews, 44, and wife Kimberly, 25, live in a two-story townhouse in Coraopolis, Pa. with their 8-month old son, Jon.

Matthews—who now works full-time as an oil filtration technician—recently sat down with *Working Together's* Bethany Miga to talk about his journey from homeless to home sweet home.

I was doing drugs, and I was drinking a lot to try not to do drugs...I felt pretty empty. I thought I needed to try to do something to make my situation better.

I went to the Veterans Recovery Center, which is run by Gary Glacken. I got there on November 12. I got clean and found my footing again. I found my own job and was doing really good there. But my time at the recovery center was up, and we didn't have anywhere to go. Kim was pregnant and living at a women's shelter through the Salvation Army. I didn't know where we were going to stay...what we were going to do.

I was talking to Gerry Phillips, my case worker, and she was like, 'Don't give up! Let's figure something out.'

Later, we found out that the VA had approached The American Legion and finalized arrangements to put me and the baby and Kim in a townhouse. I

felt so relieved. Helen Copney, a social services assistant at the VA, picked us up and drove us over to the apartment. I didn't really know what to expect. It was nice. It still is nice. It's a townhouse. A three-bedroom. There are four townhouses in a row, and Veterans live in the other three. The VA even bought a crib for little baby Jonny Red. The other Veterans love watching him grow up; they call him 'the VA baby.'

When we moved in, we only brought our clothes and we got the baby stuff and that's it. It was already furnished. That is the thing...you can't bring your furniture in, and I was like, 'You're in luck, we don't have any furniture.'

Looking back on it all, I'm just so thankful to Gary and Gerry—without them I wouldn't have made it. It feels so good to have come so far...I am pretty proud of myself. 

spotlight on
HEALTH CARE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS
 Every year, VA Pittsburgh's Health Care for Homeless Veterans program provides an array of outpatient services to more than 800 homeless Veterans in transitional and permanent residential settings. This 12-person team also works with a variety of nonprofit organizations and veterans service organizations—as they did in the case of Jon Matthews—to secure necessary housing for Veterans in need.

A CONTINUUM of Care

Many homeless Veterans utilize a combination of specialized VA programs—including the ones listed below—during their journey toward recovery and independence

PSYCHIATRIC

The **Psychiatric Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program** introduces Veterans with psychiatric disorders to the VA and helps transition them to a community residential role of their choice.

CONTACT
Bridget Wright
412-822-1403
Bridget.Wright@va.gov

RESIDENTIAL

At the **Veterans Recovery Center**, Veterans live for roughly four months in a residential-style setting on VAPHS grounds while working to secure community employment and stable housing.

CONTACT
Gary Glacken
412-822-1325
Gary.Glacken@va.gov

BEHAVIORAL

The **Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders** is a behavioral health program that offers an array of services for Veterans with questions or concerns related to the use of alcohol or other substances.

CONTACT
Wendy Merrill
412-954-4108
Wendy.Merrill@va.gov

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Every year, **Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)** offers more than 800 homeless Veterans comprehensive outpatient services such as health care, community outreach, and case management for transitional and permanent housing. HCHV is an umbrella program that includes the following subprograms:

- The **Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH)** voucher program provides rental assistance and other support services to eligible Veterans and families in permanent housing.
- The **Grant & Per Diem** program helps Veterans achieve residential stability by funding grants to community agencies for transitional housing and support services.
- The **Supportive Housing Program** offers transitional housing to eligible Veterans and families whose goals include independent living.
- The **Veterans Justice Outreach** program connects Veterans in the criminal justice system with VA services to help them avoid unnecessary incarceration and criminalization.

CONTACT
Mary Frances Pilarski
412-822-1272
Mary.Pilarski@va.gov

VOCATIONAL

Comprehensive Vocational Services (CVS) assesses a Veteran's abilities and interests, provides job-seeking skills and assists Veterans in securing and maintaining employment. CVS is an umbrella program comprised of the following subprograms:

- The **Compensated Work Therapy** program connects eligible Veterans with employment opportunities and is comprised of two initiatives: Transitional Work Experience and Supported Employment. Transitional Work Experience offers Veterans contracted work roles in an effort to boost their marketable skills, employability and self-confidence. Supported Employment helps Veterans with serious mental illnesses locate and maintain competitive community employment.
- In **Incentive Therapy**, inpatients and outpatients work throughout the health care system in roles that complement their skill set or career aspirations.
- The **Transitional Residency Program** provides a rehabilitation-focused residential setting for Veterans recovering from chronic mental illness, chemical dependency and homelessness.

CONTACT
John Erskine
412-822-1285
John.Erskine@va.gov

{ the experts corner }



POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER



Studies suggest that at least one in 10 Veterans experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that stems from a traumatic event. "War is, by its very nature, filled with horrific and nightmarish experiences of death and destruction," says Dan Ziff, a social worker and VA Pittsburgh's resident expert on PTSD. Below, Ziff offers five tips on how Veterans and their loved ones can cope with—and beat—this age-old disorder.

1 Recognize the warning signs "Individuals may experience social withdrawal, sleep problems and nightmares, increased substance abuse, hyper-arousal and vigilance, emotional numbing and intrusive memories."

2 Family: get involved "When a loved one returns home from the war, allow time for their mind to catch up with their body. Be patient and supportive. If they cannot recover, get information to share with them and stress the benefits of counseling."

3 Do not believe the hype "Hollywood has created the image of those returning from war as 'time bombs' waiting to explode. The reality is that most men and women suffer silently, haunted in a very private manner."

4 Take a brave first step "Many consider it a weakness to ask for help, but those in counseling will tell you it takes tremendous strength to engage in the healing process. Exercise the courage it takes to talk to someone about your problems."

5 Tap into the VA's services "Getting together with other Veterans going through this process can greatly facilitate the healing. The VA leads the way in the treatment of PTSD and provides individual, couple, family and group therapies as well as education and assessment services. Newly returned Vets can utilize a specialty clinic that helps case manage all of their emotional and physical care."



COLORECTAL CANCER



A New Study Aims to Encourage Veterans to Get Life-Saving Colorectal Exams

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. In 2008, some 150,000

people were diagnosed with colorectal cancer and nearly 50,000 people died from the disease.

The good news is that, if discovered early enough, physicians can treat and even cure this type of cancer. As a result, physicians like Bruce Ling at VAPHS are interested in increasing the number of patients who get screened for colorectal cancer.

"These screenings are one of our most important tools to help us detect—and then beat— colorectal cancer," says Dr. Ling, who is co-leading a study that investigates Veterans' preferences and opinions regarding the various types of screening tests available.

In the study, 500 Veterans at VA Pittsburgh and the Ann Arbor VA in Michigan will navigate a quick 20-minute computer program about colorectal cancer screening before going to their regularly scheduled primary care appointment. "Our hope is that this program will encourage the viewers to follow through with the actual screening, and that decision can be a life-saving one," says Dr. Ling.

Eligible participants must be due—or overdue—for a colorectal cancer screening and be Veterans between the ages of 50 and 79. Beyond viewing the computer program, patients will need to participate in one or two follow-up phone surveys. In exchange for their time, Veterans selected for the study will receive \$25 cash.



{ the mailbag }

EDITOR'S NOTE

Our Mailbag section typically spotlights Veteran-penned letters applauding VA Pittsburgh's staff. This issue, we are mixing things up by highlighting an employee's complimentary letter to Veterans. The note appeared on Mrs. Wolf's message board—which is available to all staff members via VA Pittsburgh's internal Web site—in the wake of the big snowstorm of 2010.

Sent: Tue Feb 09, 2010

Subject: **Snow Days**

Ms. Wolf,

I would like to put in a special thanks to the **Veterans who are currently residing in the Veterans Recovery Center** here at Heinz. Upon being released on Sunday morning (many of us working from Friday night on), our staff went to the parking lot to find our cars stuck in all the snow that had accumulated over the weekend. The Veterans who reside there happily dug each and every one of us out of the snow with only the comment, "We're Veterans. That's what we do." As a fellow Veteran and a staff nurse here, I would like to thank them for their service to our country and their generosity in our recent troubles.

Anonymous

Service Awards

Congratulations to the following employees who recently reached a benchmark in dedicated service to the United States Government!

40 Years

George Gedman	Facilities Management
Monica Ketter	Office of the Director

35 Years

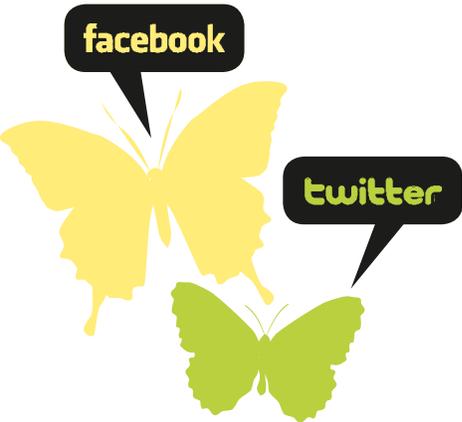
Thaddeus Gilliard	Nutrition and Food Service
Susan Keevican	Clinical Support
Robert Lee	Primary Care
Shelton Paylor	Nutrition and Food Service
Ida Smith	Patient Care Services
George Thompson	Environmental Management

30 Years

James Baker	VISN 4
Willie Bennett	Surgical Specialty
Roxane Blumling	Critical Care
Debra Bunting	Canteen
Curtis Daniels	Environmental Management
James Davis	Facilities Management
Melanie Erskine	Behavioral Health
Debra Ferro	Critical Care
Leona Glabicki	Community Based Care
Rajiv Jain	Chief of Staff
Richard Jeffery	Facilities Management
Lois Keyes	Business Service
David Macintyre	Facilities Management
Patrick McAtee	Facilities Management
Dale McCandless	Human Resources
Sharon Morisetty	Patient Care Services
Denise Myers	Patient Care Services
Alonzo O'Neil	Environmental Management
Kathleen Policchio	VISN 4
Michelle Poropatic	Critical Care
Karen Proffitt	Human Resources
Mira Whalen	Medical Specialty

For the full list of employees who recently hit career milestones, check out the new "Service Awards" section on the VAPHS intranet: vawww.pittsburgh.va.gov/service_awards.asp

{ have you heard? }



Health Care's Social Butterfly

VAPHS is now on Facebook and Twitter, making it easy to receive health tips and learn about upcoming events and job openings. Twitter-ites can follow us @VAPittsburgh. Not a member? No problem! You can still get the news at www.twitter.com/VAPittsburgh. Or fan us at www.facebook.com/VAPHS.



Tuning in to VA Pittsburgh
The health care system recently launched these TV-driven initiatives

- VAPHS's first installment of digital news boards—six flat-screen TVs displaying rotating messages—are up and running at the University Drive and Heinz divisions. Staff can visit VA Pittsburgh's public affairs intranet page to submit content.
- VAPHS has started a new video-on-demand program, which allows Veterans to learn about more than 250 health topics—like diabetes, obesity and back pain—through their inpatient room's TV.

Ready to Serve...Pizza, Salads and More!

The canteen at Heinz is open for business! The renovated space—which began serving customers in early March—boasts a bistro, salad bar, personal pizza station and "country cooking" section. "The design will reduce wait times and serve more patrons than ever before," says Todd Houck, vice president of facilities management at VAPHS.



In 2009, volunteers donated **129,202** hours of service—the workload equivalent of 62 full-time employees.



★ PATCH TALK



Eric Carey, a Veteran of the Air Force's 90th Security Squadron and a sergeant with the VA police.

Carey's squadron, headquartered at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, is responsible for protecting the base's national security assets—including missiles. This mission is reflected in the unit's colorful logo. "The cloud represents the creation of a new firmament," says Carey of his military-issued patch. "The eagle symbolizes the United States and its air strike power, and the three stars represent the Army, Navy and Air Force." Twenty-five years later, "the patch still gives me a sense of pride," says Carey. "It reminds me that I proudly served my country."

WORKING TOGETHER

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MANAGING EDITOR
David E. Cowgill

EDITOR
Bethany Miga

CONTRIBUTORS
Arin Gencer
Shelley K. Nulph
Heather L. Frantz

PHOTOGRAPHY
Glenn Hangard
Warren Park

Terry Gerigk Wolf, FACHE
Director and Chief Executive Officer

Rajiv Jain, MD
Chief of Staff

Bonnie S. Graham, MBA
Associate Director

Ira Richmond, RN, MS, NEA-BC
Associate Director for
Patient Care Services

John A. Gennaro, FACHE,
MBA, MHSA
Associate Director for Site Management

We'd Like to Hear From You

Working Together serves employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. To suggest editorial content for future issues or to request additional copies of this issue, please contact us at **412-822-3533** or **bethany.miga@va.gov**.

