

Working Together

Issue 19
Spring 2005



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Newly renovated VAPHS Operating Suites provide the most state-of-the-art environment for surgical procedures

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A Message from the **Director**

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www.va.gov/pittsburgh

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Working Together**
(1999-2005)

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Dear Fellow Employees, Volunteers, Veterans and Friends of the VA,

THE VAPHS Major Construction Project continues to move forward in our endeavors to provide an improved environment of care to the veterans we serve and our staff. The design of the new 1,500-space parking garage for our University Drive Division (UD) is nearly completed, and construction is scheduled to begin later this year and will continue for a two-year period. An architectural rendering of the parking garage can be seen below. During construction of the garage, approximately 700 employee parking spaces will be temporarily displaced. Access to UD during construction is a concern shared by all veterans, visitors, and staff. Plans are underway to minimize the impact construction will have on employees.

We are exploring multiple approaches to temporarily relocate parking during the construction through off-site parking, which may include: relocating staff and services from UD to our Highland Drive Division (HD) during the construction; lease off-site parking with preference to the Oakland area; develop additional parking at HD; emphasize alternative transportation to UD such as vanpools, public transportation and the Federal Transit Benefit program; provide routine, contract shuttle transportation services between UD and remote parking lots.

Approximately 200 staff parking spaces will remain at UD until completion of the parking garage. In general terms, employees who are closest to the care of patients will be provided closer access to onsite parking to the extent possible. Parking for our veteran patients will remain onsite during the construction project.

Prior to construction, employee transportation fairs will be held to inform you of available parking options. I would encourage you to periodically check the major construction website (www.va.gov/pittsburgh/construction35.asp), invite the Office of Major Construction (OMC) to attend your staff meetings and attend town hall meetings.

This Spring issue of *Working Together* for 2005 features an article on a veteran patient's journey through the bariatric surgery process, the results of the 2004 VAPHS CFC Campaign, and highlights of newly renovated spaces aimed at continuing to provide care that is second to none. It also spotlights the many outstanding achievements and milestones of our staff.

Sincerely,



Michael E. Moreland
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

WARREN PARK PHOTO



*Patient entry view of
the new parking garage
expansion project*



Vital Signs

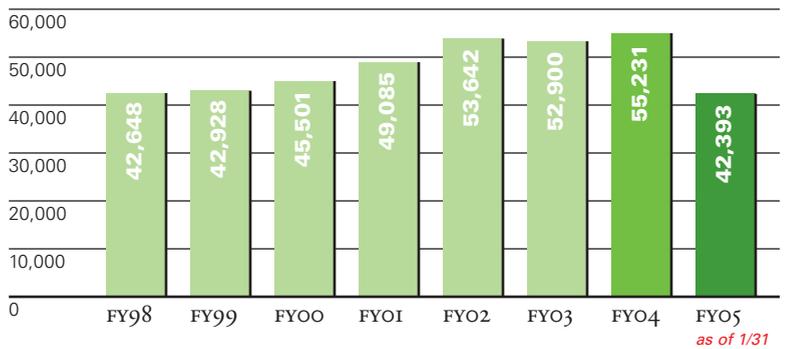
VAPHS Appoints Associate Director

Ms. Patricia Nealon was appointed as Associate Director of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System on December 26, 2004. Ms. Nealon began her career at the VA Medical Center Highland Drive as a Clinical Social Worker and has held numerous clinical and administrative positions at the VA Pittsburgh. Most recently she has been serving as the Acting Associate Director since September 2003. She holds a BA from the University of Pittsburgh and an MSW from Tulane University.

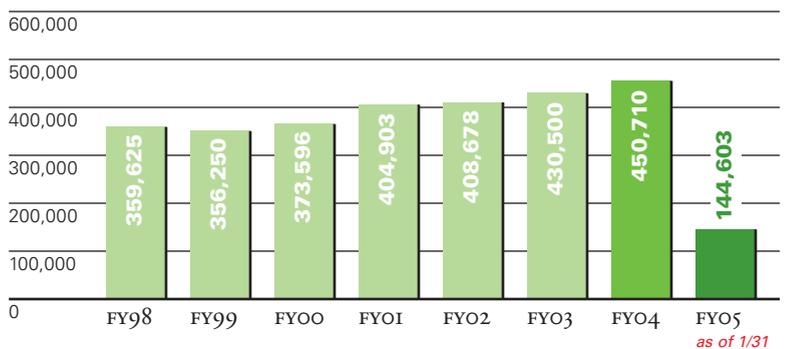


WARREN PARK PHOTO

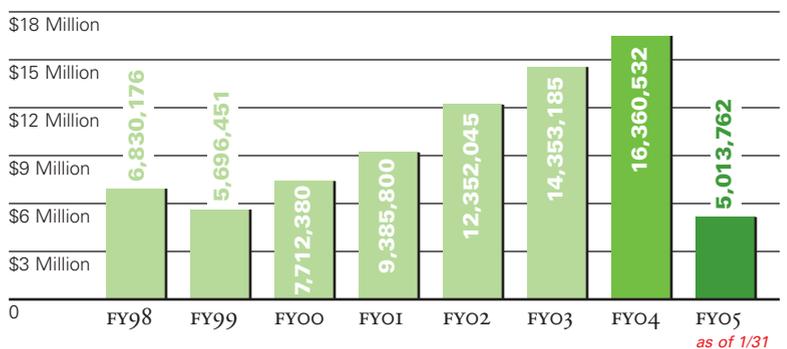
UNIQUE PATIENTS



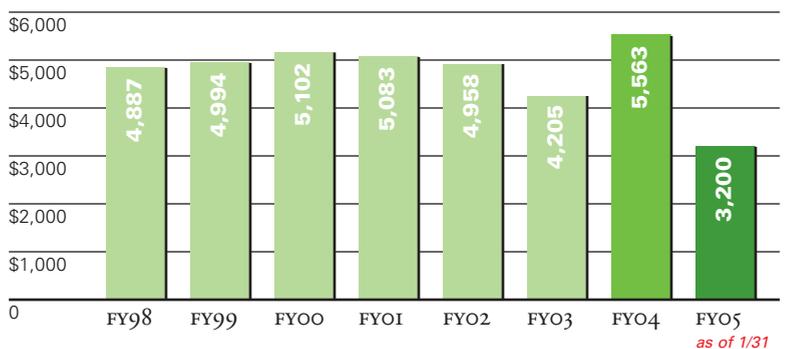
OUTPATIENT VISITS



MEDICAL CARE COST RECOVERY



OBLIGATIONS/UNIQUE PATIENT



Bariatric Surgery Gives Veteran Patients A New Life

In the general population the rate of obesity has doubled over the last decade. Obesity impairs quality of life and impacts every aspect of a human being's life. People who are obese suffer from frequent falls and injuries. They often don't like to leave the house. Many can't go on airplanes or go to the movies. Society sees obesity as a flaw— but it is actually a disease. There is not one cause of obesity. It is a multi-factoral problem that is often influenced by things such as environment, genetics, and psychological issues.

On August 27, 2003, the first bariatric surgery was performed at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System to help a veteran lose weight. Since then, over 25 patients have received bariatric surgery at the University Drive Division. Currently, only 14 VAs nationwide provide bariatric surgery services to qualified candidates. More than 200,000 veterans nationally are potentially eligible for bariatric surgery.

Dr. George Eid, Assistant Professor of Surgery and Director of Minimally Invasive and Bariatric Surgeries, leads a multi-disciplinary team at the VAPHS with representatives from nursing, lab, social work, radiology, nutrition, psychiatry, and surgical in providing patients with a complete network of care and support to aid them in their weight loss.

WARREN PARK PHOTO



Anthony Owens has lost 135 pounds since beginning the bariatric surgery process at the VAPHS.

Anthony Owens, a bariatric patient at the VAPHS, said that he inquired about bariatric surgery. “I was tired of being miserable,” said Mr. Owens. He explained that he was constantly gaining weight and suffering from constant back and leg pain.

In order to qualify for bariatric surgery, a veteran must be 100 pounds or more over their ideal body weight and be at risk for becoming a victim of obesity complicated by medical problems. They have to first try a physician-supervised diet and fail. Gastric bypass may have a large cost up front, but in the long term it will help to save money on medical treatment and medications.

Gastric bypass surgery is a procedure that involves reducing the stomach to the size of a thumb and rerouting food to a lower part of the intestine to cut absorption. This surgery is usually done laparoscopically, requiring hospitalization of 2-3 days and recovery of about 2 weeks. Open gastric bypass surgery is rarely performed.

As Dr. Eid explains, patient compliance and commitment are critical for making the surgery a success. Gastric bypass surgery is not a fix for losing weight— it is a tool. The patient must use this tool well to ultimately obtain their weight loss goal. They must understand the nutritional guidelines and be committed to exercise. Many patients are required to go through a medical weight loss program before the surgery is even performed to reduce the risks of the surgery. The goal is to be able to perform the surgery laparoscopically to promote a quicker recovery and minimize the risk of infection. The pre-op diet also helps to ensure that the patient shows the discipline needed to follow the post-op guidelines.

Jamie Slater, Clinical Nutrition Coordinator, and Julie Heinzl, Optifast Nutrition Coordinator, worked closely with Mr. Owens. He is described as “a model patient—



motivated, compliant, and very positive.” Mr. Owens was required to go on an Optifast diet for almost eight weeks prior to having bariatric surgery. Optifast is a medically monitored treatment plan that utilizes high quality meal replacement formulas. It must be followed with the supervision of physicians, registered dietitians, and trained counselors. Along with the Optifast liquids, Mr. Owens was allowed to drink water and calorie-free soda. The VAPHS is the only VA to currently utilize the Optifast plan and it is used only in conjunction with bariatric surgery.

Mr. Owens lost 54 pounds on the Optifast diet prior to having surgery. He explained that the hardest part of complying with the guidelines of the diet was smelling the food his wife and kids were eating. So whenever the smells started to tempt him, he would go for a walk. “I did a lot of walking,” he noted.

But the walking helped Mr. Owens be more successful in his goal. “I wouldn’t have lost that amount of weight with just the Optifast alone. That’s why I started walking. Once I started feeling results, and other people could see the results, it made me want to walk even more. I started increasing my distance, walking in different places, and always made sure to include hills when I walked.”

Mr. Owens reached his pre-surgery goal and was scheduled to have laparoscopic bariatric surgery on October 6, 2004. Since the surgery, he has lost an additional 81 pounds. The most rapid weight loss occurs in the eight months after having surgery and weight loss slows down after a year.

Completing the Optifast diet prior to having the surgery also helped Mr. Owens comply with post-surgery guidelines. Not following these restrictions can cause the patient to become really sick. But Mr. Owens stated that after doing the Optifast liquid diet, he was so excited to be allowed solid foods that he was focused on what he could have, not what he couldn’t.

Dr. Eid and his staff will follow Mr. Owens in clinic every three months for the first year and every six months for the second year. Then he will only have to come in once a year. All bariatric patients are encouraged to attend a monthly support group. The support enables patients to learn new ways of eating healthy and handling stress. The patients can support each other as they work on behavior

modification techniques. Registered dietitians, such as Julie Heinzl, follow them in case they need any support with new eating habits.

It is a long, challenging process, but Anthony Owens has no complaints. He now has energy, can take care of himself more easily, and is receiving lots of compliments from people around him. He said that he can feel the results in his daily activities and is amazed that he no longer struggles to complete them. And he is also thrilled that four months after having the surgery, he can eat everything he’s always eaten, just not as much.

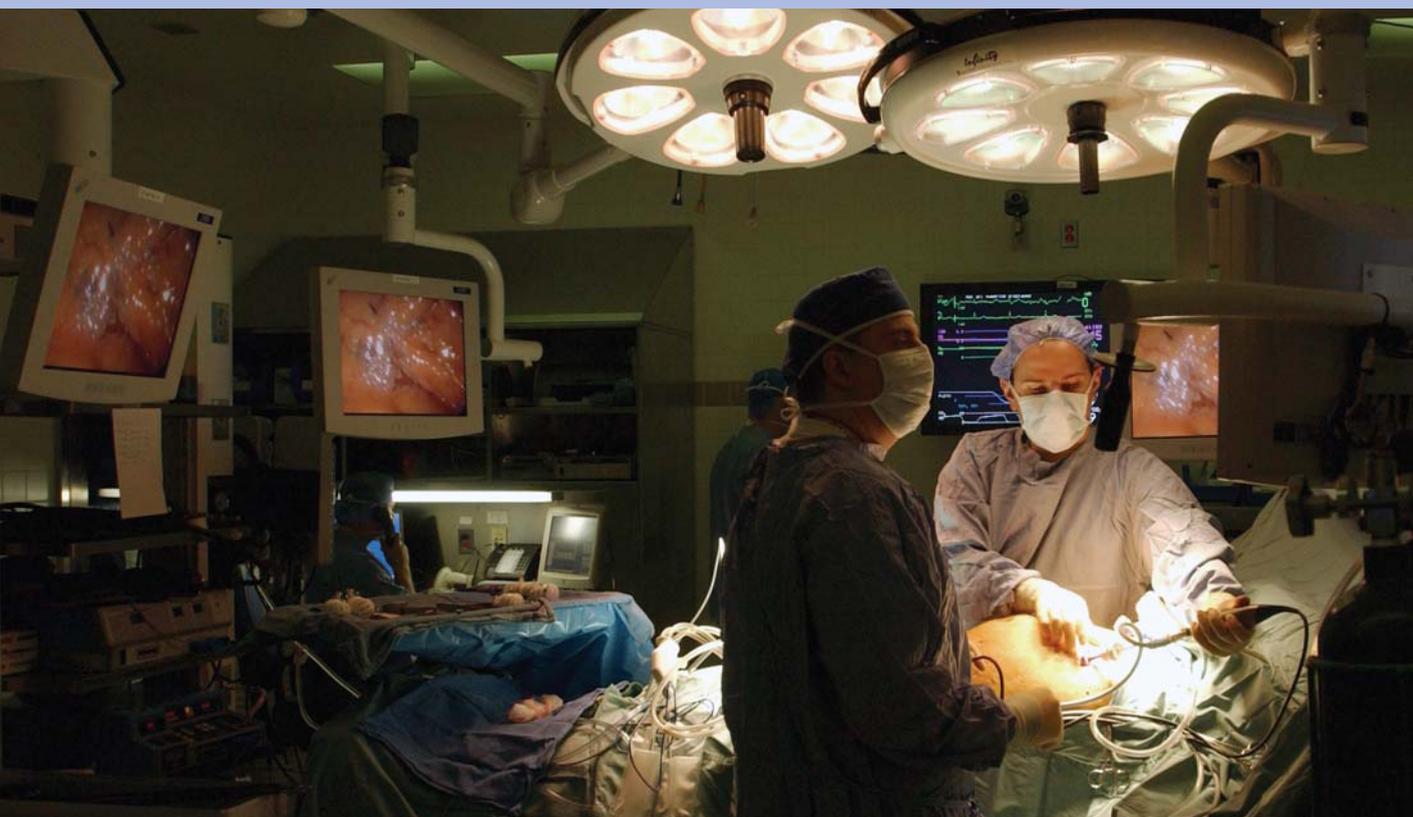
Mr. Owens proclaims that his success would not have been possible without the support of his family as well as the professional staff at the VA Pittsburgh. He said that without their help and explanation, he would have gotten discouraged and given up. But he did not give up and is well on his way to becoming a new man.

Dr. George Eid talks with Mr. Owens at his three-month follow-up appointment.



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Newly renovated state-of-the-art Operating Suite.



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Mailbox

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter and do not know where to begin. I want to sincerely thank the VA for all the help you gave to my father, W.S., over the course of the last five years.

Mr. Don Maus was nothing short of an Angel to not only my father, but especially to my mother, who relied on him so very much through all of my father's sickness.

Our outpost of the VA in St. Clairesville, Ohio, saved my father's life on two occasions, catching him in the nick of time, and telling me what should be done to help him and where to take him.

Cardiologist, Dr. Mark Thompson, who found my father to have a life threatening problem, was nothing short of miraculous. I owe these men and women the gratitude of a lifetime for all they did. I watched as Dr. Thompson left the ER at 7PM, a good time probably after he should have been done working.

Thanks to the Physical Therapy Dept. that took my father under their wing and provided him with everything possible to make him be able to stay at home in the dignity he deserved.

Every time I would thank them, or tell them I could not believe what all they were doing for my father, every one of these individuals would simply look at me and say, "He earned this."

I truly want to tell all of you individually what you have done for my family, my mother, and especially my father. But this letter will have to serve the purpose. You gave my father the dignity he so greatly deserved to stay at home. You were a consoling force for my mother, and a guiding force for all of my family—for this you have my undying gratitude and appreciation.

This letter was hard to write for the simple fact: how do you thank or begin to thank individuals for saving a loved one's life, then caring for it? You gave my father dignity right to the end, a finer act cannot be done on this earth.

Sincerely,

—W.S.

Dear Sir,

I have been going to the VA hospital in Pittsburgh for over 20 years. I have always been treated fairly and with respect by the physicians and the staff. I would like to bring to your atten-

tion something that happened on my last visit with Doctor James Lynch.

Every time I have an appointment with Dr. Lynch, he personally comes out to greet me with a handshake and a smile. He always asks how I have been and always takes a personal interest in my life.

While visiting with Dr. Lynch at my last appointment, he informed me that I was one of his success stories. He informed me that all of my lab results were extremely remarkable and that I had lost 20 pounds as well. He went on to praise me and made me feel very good about myself. He asked me how I did it and I told him that my wife was responsible for helping to take such good care of me and my health matters. He told me to keep up the good work and stressed again how proud he was of me.

When I arrived at home my wife informed me of a phone call she had received from Dr. Lynch. Dr. Lynch made a personal call to my wife to let her know that he was proud of what she was doing to help me maintain good health.

Never before have I had a doctor take such a personal interest with me as did Dr. Lynch. It is his positive reinforcement that keeps me thinking positively about myself and my health.

Everybody seems to complain when things go wrong. However, I would like to bring to your attention something that has made a big impact in my life.

I thank God for doctors, like Dr. Lynch, who have a sincere concern for their patients. I just thought that doctors like this should not go unnoticed.

Sincerely,

—R.M.

Dear Mr. Moreland:

As T.'s primary caregiver, I am writing this letter to thank everyone involved with my husband's health care services.

I had knee surgery this summer, requiring me to be in the hospital for almost three full weeks. Therefore, T. was in the Aspinwall Hospital for several weeks. Bob Bowden went out of his way to explain the benefits to my son and daughter, looking out for T.'s best interest the entire time. I can't even explain how much that meant to me. T. enjoyed the exercise sessions, the physical therapy, bingo, and the interaction with the pleasant staff. He was also taken to Oakland several times for scheduled tests. It was very comforting for me and the rest of the family to know that my husband was being well cared for at the Aspinwall site while I was under the weather.

This is a wonderful benefit that T. is eligible for and I just really wanted to express my deepest gratitude to you and your outstanding staff at the VA centers in Aspinwall and in Oakland.

Sincerely,

—B.T.

\$100,000 CFC GOAL TOPPED!

Federal workers have participated in the Combined Federal Campaign, a national workplace giving effort, since President Kennedy initiated a formal national giving program for federal workers in 1961. Since then, the CFC has evolved into the nation's leading workplace giving program.

The 2004 campaign at the VAPHS was conducted from September 1 through December 15. By raising \$102,557.51, the medical center surpassed our goal of \$100,000 and last year's donations of \$90,783. Among the most popular charities that VAPHS employees chose to pledge: American Red Cross (\$976), the Food Bank (\$5,062), and the Salvation Army (\$5,129).

The committee guided employees through the campaign with flyers, completed forms, conveniently located "Drop-Boxes," and a kick-off which consisted of a wiener roast for evening staff and Krispy Kreme donuts for night and day staff. They also offered incentives including a VCR/DVD player, a TV/VCR/DVD, tickets to a University of Pittsburgh vs. West Virginia University football game, and a night at the Renaissance Hotel. In addition, the committee sold raffle tickets on gift baskets—a Home Depot basket (with a \$50 gift certificate), a Christmas Joy collection, and a Golf Mania set. The basket raffle raised \$1,100.

“
By raising
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the medical
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\$100,000
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donations of
\$90,783.
”



Alan Bernstein

MSN, RN

ALAN BERNSTEIN, MSN, RN, WAS RECENTLY APPOINTED AS THE NEW NURSING PROGRAM LEADER FOR THE H. JOHN HEINZ III PROGRESSIVE CARE CENTER OF THE VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.

In this position, Alan will be responsible for all nursing on the seven inpatient units at the Heinz Division. He will have direct supervision of the nurse managers, the patient care coordinators, the wound nurse and the clinical nurse specialist who are currently located at Heinz.

WARREN PARK PHOTO



Alan began working at the VAPHS in the spring of 1998 as a staff nurse on the oncology/neurology unit at University Drive Division. He has since worked as a staff nurse in Critical Care, served as a patient care coordinator, ADP coordinator for Patient Care Services, nurse manager, and has

been serving as the acting nursing program leader at the Highland Drive Division for the past five months.

Alan has an associate degree from Community College of Allegheny County-Boyce Campus, a bachelor of nursing degree from University of Pittsburgh, and a masters in nursing administration from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Alan is married with two daughters, ages 21 and 17, and has two dogs and a bird. He also has a degree in photography and multimedia from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He is a member of the East Suburban Artists League where he enjoys participating in group shows.

EMPLOYEES WITH

20 years

OR **more** OF SERVICE!



CONGRATULATIONS!

The employees listed have reached a benchmark in their years of government service during the period December 1, 2004 through January 31, 2005.

30 years

Charlean Jones
Nutrition & Food

William H. Mills
Human Resources

Richard P. O'Toole
Patient Care

Shelton Paylor
*Associate Director
for Site Operations*

Frances T. Smith
Clinical Support

Wesley L. Wilson
Facilities Management

25 years

Curtis C. Daniels
Facilities Management

Rajiv Jain
Chief of Staff

Vincent W. Mondini
Facilities Management

Michelle E. Poropatic
Critical Care

Cheryl L. Squier
Medical Specialty

Barbara J. Wisniewski
Facilities Management

20 years

Kathleen A. Abruzese
Nutrition and Food

Rudolph F. Bonenberger
Facilities Management

David S. Creighton
Surgical Specialty

Milton Daniels
Facilities Management

James Goscinski
Clinical Support

Richard V. Graham
Critical Care

Susan K. Keevican
Clinical Support

Reginald Lee
Clinical Support

Maria C. Marks
Behavioral Health

Patrick G. McAtee
Facilities Management

Denise D. Myers
Patient Care

Charles E. Potter
Patient Care

Vicki M. Suchar
Patient Care

Diane M. Thacker
Clinical Support

John W. Tierney
Facilities Management

Laura C. Tommarello
Business Service

Debra A. Walls
Patient Care



GLENN HANGARD PHOTOS



◀ New Hoptel Unit Dedicated

On January 31, 2005, U.S. Congressman Mike Doyle and VAPHS Leadership dedicated the newly renovated Hoptel area at the University Drive Division of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

For the past several years, the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System has been providing lodging for veterans traveling an excessive distance, veterans traveling during inclement weather, and for those veterans without transportation.

The goal of this new unit is to provide a comfortable and pleasant area within the hospital to heal. At a final cost of \$1,534,001.36, this renovation of 8,400 square feet provided 16 bedrooms with a total of 20 beds, laundry facilities, a new HVAC system, a front reception desk, and a lounge/buffet/dining area that includes vending machines, an ice machine, appliances, and a large screen television.

Top photo: (L to R) VAPHS Director Michael Moreland, Congressman Mike Doyle, VAPHS Social Worker Donna Papinchak, and VAPHS Chief of Staff Dr. Rajiv Jain

Bottom photo: Mr. Moreland and Congressman Mike Doyle tour a Hoptel room

Newly Renovated Surgical Clinic Area Dedicated ▶

VAPHS Executive Leadership, Staff of the Surgical Specialty Service Line, and U.S. Congressman Tim Murphy dedicated the newly renovated surgical clinic area on 5-East on January 13, 2005. This renovation of a 13,800 square foot area cost \$2,269,829.02 and provided 22 state-of-the-art exam rooms, nurses' workrooms, nurses' stations including check-in and check-out and a waiting room area, new restrooms and a new HVAC system.

VAPHS Director Michael Moreland, Congressman Tim Murphy, and VAPHS Associate Director Pat Nealon



WARREN PARK PHOTO

WARREN PARK PHOTOS



◀ VA Café Coffee Shop Now Open at University Drive

On January 12, 2005, a Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony was held to celebrate the opening of the new VA Café Coffee Shop on the first floor of the University Drive Division. Mr. Moreland, Director of the VAPHS, stated that this new enhancement was a result of the VAPHS' effort to "consistently modernize and upgrade service for veterans, staff and employees." William Buzzell, Regional Manager of the Veterans Canteen Service, stated that this new café is the first of its kind throughout the region. The VA Café Coffee Shop is proud to brew Starbucks coffee as well as serving pastries, salads and more. It is open Monday through Friday from 6:30AM to 3:30PM.

Top photo: (L to R) William Buzzell, Regional Manager of the Veterans Canteen Service; Michael Moreland, Director VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System; Janet Shawkey, Chief of VAPHS Veterans Canteen Service; and Pat Nealon, Associate Director VAPHS

Bottom photo: New VA Café Coffee Shop