



National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans

Respect, compassion and commitment are three of several core values ingrained in the CAVHCS mission. So, while it may often come as no real surprise when these values are exemplified in an event like the recent National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans, it's always inspiring when it has a positive impact on veterans as well as staff.

"This year's Salute to Hospitalized Veterans was a success once again," said Chief of Voluntary Services, William Petty. "As usual, it was a CAVHCS-wide effort. From Environmental Management and the Police staff to Recreational Services, Volunteer Services and of course all the nursing staff the teamwork involved was wonderful."

The concept of the annual National Salute focuses on hospitalized veterans, while targeting and

promoting involvement of members of local communities.

"The National Salute is only successful when we have the involvement of the community," explained Petty. "This year, as usual, we benefited from the continued support of our veterans association groups, but we also saw students from Maxwell Air Force Base, the Tuskegee Army and Air Force ROTC, Booker T. Washington High School and even Hardaway High School from as far away as Columbus, Ga."



Members of the Tuskegee Army and Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps were some of the hundreds of volunteers to deliver shopping carts full of Valentines during this year's annual National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.

Delivering forget-me-nots and Valentines on Valentines Day to hospitalized veterans has a very real impact on their morale and even their health, "It's amazing," explained Tuskegee Campus Chief Nurse of Geriatrics, Extended Care and Rehabilitation, Patricia Gullette.

"It's not the cut-out pieces of paper that matter. It's the fact

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Black History Month

CAVHCS Observances Entertain, Educate

The CAVHCS Equal Employment Diversity Advisory Committee held several events in February to commemorate Black History Month. From the Talent Expose, which featured performances by both staff and veterans to the extremely well-received Lunch and Learns that featured an HBO documentary "Unchained Memories, Readings from Slave Narratives...in their own words," CAVHCS members were entertained, educated and even moved.

"I think the two Lunch and Learns were extremely successful," said CAVHCS EEO Diversity Advisory Committee member Shai Holden. "It was

obvious that the HBO documentary was very moving. I've received several requests to schedule another showing, and if we can I'll be sure to let everyone know."



From the Director

Robert W. Ratliff, Ph.D., FACHE



It's been awhile since I was able to address you all in the Grapevine – or what we are now calling our newsletter – the CAVHCS Salute. The new title represents a slight adjustment in focus brought to us by our new Public Affairs Officer, and I look forward to providing a “salute” to so many of your extraordinary efforts within these pages.

In the upcoming months you'll be reading more about our efforts to support our core values of; trust, respect, excellence, compassion, courage, commitment and integrity. Each of us probably has our own unique definition or example of what these ideals mean. Additionally, each of us has our own reason for choosing to serve in the healthcare profession. Whatever your definition or reasons, I trust you'll have the courage and integrity to always remain committed to providing our veterans with excellent care in a manner that nurtures trust, respect and compassion.

Since the CAVHCS Salute is a (news)letter you'll also see more about what and who is new here at CAVHCS. For instance, in this edition you'll read about our achievement in the recent JCAHO inspection. Incidentally, if you haven't heard JCAHO is now known as The Joint Commission or TJC.

It's always nice to be able to welcome somebody into the CAVHCS family. However, in this case that feeling is particularly special, because I get to welcome someone I already know and admire. We are incredibly fortunate to have Ms. Shirley M. Bealer, MS, RN, CNA, BC, CPHQ join us here at CAVHCS. She's got more letters behind her name than I do – and we're lucky to have her. I have firsthand knowledge of her capabilities having worked with her while she served as Associate Director for Patient/Nursing Services for Central Texas Veterans Health Care System. Now let me tell you a few things you can't read in a bio. Shirley Bealer is kind, professional, empathic and fair. When she arrives she has agreed to serve as Acting Associate Director until we have hired a permanent replacement for Lea Wiggins (*please see page 4*).

Ms. Sarah Williams, BSN, MA, RN, CNA, BC has graciously agreed to stay on as our AD for Patient Services during the search process. I did not know Sarah previous to her detail here, but I have quickly grown to admire her knowledge, skills and judgment. We are so fortunate to have two such highly qualified individuals working with us.

While these folks are new to CAVHCS I recognize that I too am relatively new, and that the CAVHCS Salute will also be a medium for me to communicate with you directly – if not in person. Many of you have read or heard me say that

we don't want to be the biggest – we want to be the best. To some of you this may sound cliché or slogan-like. To those of you who know me and where I've come from - you know this is far from a mere slogan. It is a true desire of where I want CAVHCS to be.

I owe all I have and all I have become to the VA. I went to school on the GI Bill. My father was a 100 percent, service-connected veteran of the Air Force who was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease when I was 17. For those of you unfamiliar with ALS, it's a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. Once diagnosed, the VA retrofitted our home so we could care for my father. I truly believe he was able to live as long as he did - 15 years following his diagnosis - because we were able to take care of him at home. That is why I believe so strongly in our own Home-Based Care programs, and support any effort to keep a veteran with his family. It's also why I truly believe in doing everything possible to ensure we are providing the highest quality of care.

I assure you I'm not looking for your sympathy when I tell you this. What I'm doing is trying to further open our lines of communication, so that you can better understand where I'm coming from. I realize we are all challenged at times to deliver on the ideal of truly being the best. However, I look at every veteran as a family member. And, I hope you too will call upon our shared core values to overcome our shared challenges.

If you have a means or idea that might improve a process and help overcome some of our challenges, then I hope you'll communicate them to your supervisors. If you feel your ideas aren't being considered strongly enough – then I encourage you to utilize our “Speak to the Director,” forms. These forms are read and most of them acted upon by me personally. It takes a little longer sometimes to do it this way, and occasionally I may not provide the exact answer you're looking for, but the fact is that there is a line of communication, and our shared goal has to be to continually strive toward the ideal of – “We don't want to be the biggest, we want to be the best.”

The CAVHCS Salute

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. It's an unofficial, internal communications publication.

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New Union Leadership, Runoff in Tuskegee

There's a unique synergy whenever members of the Veterans Administration exercise a democratic prerogative secured by veterans to select and affirm their leadership. And, recently the American Federation of Government Employees did just that when they held union elections.

While initial election results have been determined, in keeping with the democratic process, one electoral race - that of President, AFGE-Local 110 (Tuskegee Campus) - will be decided by a runoff vote between James Lowe and Wendell Echols held in early March. "We will be conducting a runoff election within the next 15 days," said AFGE-110 Secretary Carolyn Moffett in an email shortly after the election.

Elsewhere, AFGE -Local 503 (Montgomery Campus) has been under new leadership since late January. "People have seen me operate as a Steward for the past few years and know I'll work hard to do what's right," said

Clifton Wrencher. "We have a lot of room for growth, and people can count on me to be fair and honest."

Wrencher leads a union administration that features; Executive Vice President - Yvette McDonald; Vice President for Professionals - Mary Smith; Vice President, Non-Professionals - Catherine Paschell-Johnson and Secretary/Treasurer - Beverley Keppel.

On the Tuskegee Campus the newly elected leadership is comprised of; 1ST Vice President - Bobby Henderson; 2nd Vice President - Emma Echols; 3rd Vice President - Crassandra Marcus; Treasurer - Betty Scott; Secretary - Carolyn Moffett; Chaplin - Rhonda Lewis and Sergeant-at-Arms - Cephus Holmes

AFGE-Local 110 membership desiring to participate in the upcoming runoff election in Tuskegee should monitor Outlook email broadcasts as well as intercom and union communications for the date, time and voting procedures.

Portraits in Professionalism

Montgomery Campus Employee of the Month

February 2007

Mr. William Pepper

A Medical Support Assistant in Radiology Service, Mr. William Pepper (right) has worked at CAVHCS for many years and can always be depended on for excellent service. He treats all veterans, family members and staff with courtesy and respect.

Mr. Pepper works mainly in the X-ray file room, yet many veterans know him by name and extension. He quietly controls situations, and works quickly and independently to make sure that the needed files are ready and available so the veterans can receive the best care possible, whether here or in other VA/private facilities.

At other times he works at the desk in Radiology and keeps the department running smoothly with his professional and caring manner. A team player, he has also assisted veterans with urgent orders.



Tuskegee Campus Employee of the Month

February 2007

Mr. Curtis Flintroy

Mr. Curtis Flintroy (left) serves as Patient Services Assistant, in the Mental Health, Outpatient Clinic. He has been a key player in the smooth functioning of our clinic. Significant challenges have been faced over the past few months with major scheduling changes and coverage issues.

Throughout this period, he has gone out of his way to accommodate and address patient frustrations and issues.

Mr. Flintroy has a relaxed, "can do" attitude. He has been a major source of support to the providers.





'Salute'

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that when our patients get them, they know that visitor did it for them. It means the world to them. There's a direct impact on their sense of well being."

"I think the patients especially like to see folks in uniform," added Petty. "There's a connection or bond that transfers. It doesn't matter about generations. In fact, if anything, it connects the generations with the very special bond of service."

"It's not why they do it, but our staff benefits too," said Earl Hawkins of Voluntary Services. "They get to show visitors what they do, and how they impact our veterans' lives. Everybody involved comes away from National Salute with a positive outlook."

**Images by Eric Johnson and Robin Johnson,
CAVHCS Medical Media**



JCAHO: CAVHCS Maintains Full Accreditation

Editor Note: this is a reprint of a message sent by Dr. Ratliff immediately following the recent JCAHO inspection.

Congratulations! We're certified. The tri-annual JCAHO five-day inspection has come and gone and we maintained our full accreditation.

For many of you it's been business as usual – as it should be. For others, the past five days have been an anxious time that brought a detailed, focused evaluation of what we do and how we do it. I'm confident it's been, and will serve to be, a learning experience for all of us.

Overall I am very pleased, and take great pleasure when I say that you too should be proud of your work. Your hard work was clearly evident in the Joint Commission's final consultations. And while the natural inclination is to take a breath, relax and let our hair down a little – our veterans, our

mission and our collective professionalism mean we cannot afford that luxury while on duty.

JCAHO inspections historically bring to light a clear roadmap of where we as an institution can grow. But, just as importantly, they identify and reaffirm the value of our best practices as well as the systems we have in place to ensure we provide our veterans with the highest quality of care.

In the coming weeks we will go through a process of reevaluation in light of JCAHO findings and recommendations. I trust you will bring to bear the same level of professionalism that has served us all so well, as we look toward our common goals of continual improvement and growth in the health care continuum. Like I've said before... we don't want to be the biggest; we want to be the best. Well done!

Wiggins: 'I'm going to especially miss the people I work with...'

After 32 years of service, eight different Department of Veterans Affairs Hospitals and a career that began as a GS-2, taking an early out doesn't seem to be a fair description. Nevertheless, that's exactly what Central Alabama Veterans Administration Healthcare System Associate Director Lea Wiggins did recently before saying farewell to the people, patients and mission she'd grown to love.

"I've been working since I was 19 years old," Wiggins explained as she jotted down notes to write thank you letters and farewells. "This job means the world to me, and I'm going to especially miss the people I work with as well as the patients, but the early out program was offered in such a limited opportunity, and there were no guarantees of future offerings, so I decided I'd like to have more time to visit with my two grandchildren Elijah and William."

Even while looking forward to spending time with family and volunteering in her church, Wiggins quickly fell back into thinking about what is clearly her passion... working at the VA. "I'm not a veteran, even though my father and son are," explained Wiggins. "But I think our mission here is a noble one. I think back to a talk I had with a POW (Prisoner of War) who escaped and

walked across Italy to freedom and I realize just how proud I am to have gotten to a position where I could affect a positive change in our veterans' lives."

Having risen literally through the ranks in the Veterans Administration, Wiggins has a wealth of corporate knowledge that will not easily be replaced. "I've given a lot to the VA, but I've also received a lot," said Wiggins. "I was a single parent and we moved several times, but each time we were challenged we grew. I hope and pray that others will take advantage of some of the same opportunities I've enjoyed in the VA. If you work at it and strive to be the best, I'm proof that it's achievable."

Achievement has been a constant theme during Wiggins' tenure with the VA. "I am so proud of what we've been able to accomplish," said Wiggins. "The VA has come a long way, and that's a direct reflection on the people that work here. Now that we're getting recognition for so many of our best practices, I love to go to meetings with other hospitals, because they want to talk to me about what we're doing at the VA."

And, while Wiggins may be leaving, she fully expects that progress to continue here at CAVHCS. "Dr. Ratliff is a brilliant man, and I'm

confident CAVHCS has a wonderful future," said Wiggins. "I can't wait to hear about upcoming process and systems improvements. I know he's going to increase accountability and trust, while reaching out to our veterans more and more."

Being able to reach out to everyone before turning the page in your life is always a bittersweet challenge... especially if you decide to take a short-fused early out. "I have to write to the volunteers too," added Wiggins as she wrote herself another note. "This is an emotional time. I can't possibly say good bye to everyone the way I want to in such little time. I'm going to miss everyone so much. Of course, there is something to be said for quick goodbyes; maybe they're less painful. It just doesn't seem that way right now."



Taking care of paperwork on her final day, former Associate Director Lea Wiggins recently retired after 32 years of service.



U.S. Navy Sailors salute the ensign aboard submarine tender USS Frank Cable (AS 40) in Apra Harbor, after bringing it to half-staff in honor of former President and Navy veteran Gerald R. Ford. (U.S. Navy photo)

MARCH

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
* National Nutrition Month -- 100% Fad Free * National Women's History Month * National Professional Social Work Month				Suicide 1 Prevention Day <hr/> Social Work Month Kick-Off Breakfast (STR / TC)	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9 10 Nutrition Tip: To keep from worrying about small daily changes, only weigh yourself once a week. www.eatright.org	
National Patient Safety Awareness Week						
11 Daylight Savings Time Begins <i>'Spring forward'</i>	12	13	14	15 "Taste of Nutrition" Staff Training Room Tuskegee Campus	16 Federal Women's Program (MPR / MC)	17
18	19 Federal Women's Program (MPR / MC)	20	21 National Professional Social Work Day	22	23 Seamless Transition: Care for the Returning Combat Veterans Workshop Bldg. 90 Theater Tuskegee Campus	24
25 Nutrition Tip: Sometimes when you feel a food craving, you are really more thirsty than hungry. So, make sure that you have water and other low calorie liquids available.		26	27	28 National Professional Social Work Month Resource Fair Bldg. 90 Theater Tuskegee Campus	29 Treating Veterans with Care (STR / TC)	30
						31

* The CAVHCS Library web site provides links to federal and state income tax forms, along with filing instructions, located under "Related Items." Look for "Other Interesting Sites" and click on Internal Revenue Service – Tax Information or State Income Tax Forms.

* The CAVHCS Salute Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events. If you would like to add a CAVHCS-related event please email details directly to alam.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.