

# VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

FALL 2008

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY VETERANS

**Visit VA—  
in cyberspace!**

**Reaching out  
to our newest  
veterans**

**Keep the flu from  
bugging you**





From the Network Director:

# Where every day is Veterans Day

Dear Veteran,

**O**n Veterans Day, our nation will pause to thank you for your service. Veterans Day is the official day to honor you, America's veterans, for securing and protecting our democracy and ensuring the freedom that we enjoy—and others in the world envy.

At VA, we come to work each day with a clear and noble purpose. It's our privilege to keep President Lincoln's 1865 promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." These immortal words are VA's motto, and we consider it our sacred mission to provide the very best health care, because you who have served in uniform deserve nothing less.

I'm honored to be with an organization that serves veterans. And I'm proud to work side by side with our great staff and volunteers, many of whom are veterans themselves. November 11 may be the official day to honor American veterans, but every day is Veterans Day at VA.

Michael A. Sabo  
VA Network Director

**John Mazzulla**, Editor  
**Raymond Aalbue**, VA New York Harbor HCS  
**Jim Connell**, James J. Peters VAMC  
**Al Hong**, James J. Peters VAMC  
**Joe Sledge**, Northport VAMC  
**Sandra Warren**, VA New Jersey HCS  
**Nancy Winter**, VA Hudson Valley HCS

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>



## Get your prescriptions online

**Y**ou asked for it, and you got it! You can now use My Health Vet—VA's online service for veterans—to refill your prescriptions and view your prescription history online. To take advantage of this service, you must be a registered user of My Health Vet. As a registered user, you'll also have access to a Personal Health Journal where you can record and track your health statistics online. To register for these important benefits, visit [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).

## We're just a phone call away

**Veterans, do you have questions about your health? During weekdays (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), staff at your VA Medical Center or VA Clinic are available to assist. After 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, weekends, or holidays, call the VA Nurses Helpline at 1-800-877-6976 if you have a medical question. Remember to call 911 at any time if you're having a medical emergency.**

# It's time for your flu shot

## Here's what you need to know about being vaccinated

BY LOIS ANNE KATZ, M.D., AND MEREDITH KING-JENSEN, R.N., M.S.N.

**F**lu is a serious disease. Each year in the United States, about 5 percent to 20 percent of the population gets the flu and about 36,000 people die from it. The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year.

### Who should be vaccinated?

- people ages 50 and older
- anyone with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease
- anyone at high risk for serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk
  - health care workers
  - children ages 6 months to 19 years
  - pregnant women

### Who shouldn't be vaccinated?

- people with a severe allergy to chicken eggs

### Questions?

For more information about the flu vaccine, go to [www1.va.gov/visns/visn03/](http://www1.va.gov/visns/visn03/) or [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).

- those who have had a severe reaction to flu vaccine

### How it works

The flu shot made with killed virus is the vaccine most commonly used by VA. You won't come down with the flu from receiving the vaccine.

A nasal-spray vaccine, which is made from live, weakened flu viruses, is also available. It's only recommended for people ages 2 to 49 and women who aren't pregnant.

The flu vaccine protects against three different flu viruses. Since the viruses change, a new vaccine is prepared each year. For protection against the flu, you need to be vaccinated yearly.

It takes about two weeks after receiving a flu shot to develop antibodies that protect against flu. Side effects are few—soreness, redness or swelling at the site, a low-grade fever or some aches may occur—and usually disappear in one or two days.



### Prevent the spread

**B**esides getting a flu shot, here's how to avoid getting—or spreading—the flu virus:

- Cover your mouth when you cough.
- Wash your hands often.
- Stay home if you get sick.

### Protect yourself

Yearly flu vaccination begins in October and continues until late spring. The best time to get your shot is in October or November. All VA medical centers have the flu vaccine, and most have walk-in flu clinics. The flu vaccine is also available in primary care clinics. Call VA to find out where to get your flu shot. ■





# Let's talk it over

## Focus groups help newest veterans adjust to civilian life

BY JULIANA LAURENZI, M.S.W.

One night every week, 10 veterans being treated for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder gather to talk about how they've been dealing with life since returning from combat. The VA medical center director and staff from the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Program may join the group during a session. Veterans discuss their care at VA, offer suggestions for improvement and engage in positive banter with the VA staff. This focus group is one way VA reaches out to our newest veterans.

Focus groups are a significant component of the OEF/OIF

Program at each VA Medical Center. New veterans, their spouses or partners and VA staff are encouraged to attend. VA staff welcomes input from service members, and changes to programs have been initiated as a result of feedback from these groups. For example, evening clinics have been added to accommodate veterans who work or attend school during the day.

Each VA Medical Center also hosts a Welcome Home event annually for returning veterans and their families, which may include a job fair or family picnic. Contact your local VA Medical Center or check its Web site for dates and times for these programs. ■

## Brave new world

### VA connects with veterans in cyberspace

VA is reaching out to veterans and their families through the Second Life virtual world at [www.SecondLife.com](http://www.SecondLife.com). Virtual worlds are three-dimensional online spaces that enable people to interact with

each other and their environment through an animated character called an avatar, which is similar to characters used in video games.

Avatars can watch videos, listen to audio, view pictures, participate in presentations before a live audience, link to external Web sites and set up a live conference to communicate with other avatars. The features provide a creative way to access information that's also posted on VA's Web site.

Michael J. Kussman, M.D.,



VA Under Secretary for Health, says the virtual world "provides an imaginative, light-hearted approach to offer veterans who like to go online for information they need and can use."

The Second Life project came about through research VA conducted on how to better connect with veterans through the Internet. ■

### Reality check

For more information about VA's presence in Second Life, visit [www.va.gov/health/VHainSecondLife.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/VHainSecondLife.asp).



# Take it easy

Be good to yourself this holiday season

Regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, culture or religion, the period between Thanksgiving and the New Year is known to most as the "holiday season." While it is often experienced as a joyous time of celebrating with family and friends, for many others the holidays can bring loneliness, depression, anxiety and stress.

Try these coping strategies if you find yourself struggling through the holidays:

- **Take care of you.** You simply can't do everything, so don't overextend yourself. Rest and relaxation should be a priority. Pace yourself. Be careful about what you spend, eat and drink. Keep alcohol use to a minimum. Exercise regularly.

- **Communicate.** Reach out to others and express how you feel. E-mail, call and write letters to loved ones. Stay positive when communicating.

- **Be creative.** Celebrate in your own way, which may be different from how things are usually done. You don't need to be tied to the

past. Do the things you enjoy!

- **Be of service to others.**

Visit a lonely veteran, help out in a food pantry or find some other way to volunteer your time to another.

- **Be realistic.** Know your boundaries. This includes being aware of your financial situation so you don't overspend. Don't expect it to be a happy time for everyone. Plan ahead to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Remember that the holidays last only a short time. Seek help for depression, anxiety or stress. Call or visit your local VA Medical Center, which has expanded services to address your care needs. Best wishes to all veterans and their families for peaceful and healthy holidays! ■

## Help is here

If you need help, call your local VA Medical Center or vet center. If you're in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention toll-free hotline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

## Are you depressed?

Common symptoms of depression include feeling sad, guilty and worthless and having trouble sleeping. There may be physical problems like headaches and digestive disorders. There may also be:

- anger and violent behavior
- weight loss
- trouble concentrating
- isolation from family and friends

- avoidance of pleasurable activities
- fatigue
- alcohol or substance abuse
- thoughts or talk of suicide

If you experience an emotional crisis and need to talk to someone, or if you're thinking about harming yourself, qualified and caring VA professionals are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



George McGinnis draws his bow during the archery competition at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

# Playing to heal

Recreation therapy is more than just fun and games

**W**hen newly injured veteran George McGinnis first arrived at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center (JJPVAMC) as a paraplegic, he had one thing on his mind. “I wanted to get better and get home,” says McGinnis, 62, a burly Vietnam War combat veteran. “Physical therapy was a priority for me at the time; recreational activities weren’t.”

This philosophy is familiar to

**James J. Peters VAMC**

[www.bronx.va.gov](http://www.bronx.va.gov)

Laurel Wright and Molly Heralall, recreation therapists at the Bronx-based JJPVAMC. “Newly injured veterans have a number of very personal issues to deal with,” says Wright. “It’s an emotional process, and when veterans are ready to begin rehabilitation, they don’t always see the value of therapeutic recreation.”

## **A real confidence builder**

Recreation therapy, also referred to as therapeutic recreation, is defined by the U.S. Department of Labor as “a profession of specialists who utilize activities as a form of treatment

for persons who are physically, mentally or emotionally disabled.”

It stands to reason that veterans whose physical limitations are the most obvious difficulty they face might believe that their focus should be on physical therapy. Rehab experts, however, say the healing process is more complex and involves confronting both the physical and the emotional changes that an injured veteran encounters. The more severe the injury, the more significant the benefits of a well-rounded rehabilitation program, which includes recreation therapy.

“Recreation therapy is an integral component of a veteran’s rehabilitation,” explains Adrian Cristian, M.D., Chief of Rehabilitation Medicine at



## “Recreation therapy is an integral component of a veteran’s rehabilitation.”

—Adrian Cristian, M.D.

JJPVAMC. “Through leisure activities and community re-integration, patients learn to adapt to any difficulties they may be experiencing.”

### Getting out again

At the JJPVAMC, recreation therapists work closely with patients whose injuries are often life changing. Working in concert with other rehabilitation specialists, recreation therapists coordinate activities and excursions that help veterans heal by stimulating their social and leisure interests. Offering on-site activities like craft building, billiards and art, they also coordinate numerous off-site excursions for bowling, fishing and other activities.

Wright and Heralall specialize in the treatment of spinal cord injured veterans, arguably some of the most severely injured veterans in the medical system. It’s their mission to help their veteran patients build strength, confidence and self-esteem.

“It’s all about the patient,” says Heralall. “We need to be encouraging and persistent. We can help them see the value in some of the many programs we offer. It sometimes takes a while to get their attention, but once they try us, they usually stick with us.”

### Taking a shot at it

George McGinnis is now a true believer. “Recreational therapy is absolutely essential,” he says. “Without it, I wouldn’t have gotten better as quickly as I did.

“Attitudes can be pretty grim in those early days after an injury,” McGinnis continues. “Rec therapy helps to build camaraderie with your fellow patients. It helps you to get socialized and re-integrated with normal activities and relationships. Maybe most important, it helps you focus on things you can do, as opposed to focusing on

▶ George McGinnis takes aim.

▼ Recreation therapists Molly Heralall (left) and Laurel Wright congratulate George McGinnis on his gold-medal wins.

things you can’t do.”

This year, McGinnis traveled to Omaha, Neb., with a team from JJPVAMC to compete in the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world.

Competing in archery, air guns and trap shooting, he won two gold medals and a silver. “I’m a survivor and an adapter,” says McGinnis. “They led the way and I did what comes natural—I adapted.” ■



### Play well

To find out more about recreation therapy, go to [www1.va.gov/rectherapy/](http://www1.va.gov/rectherapy/) or [www.atra-online.com/cms/](http://www.atra-online.com/cms/). For more information about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, go to [www.wheelchairgames.va.gov/](http://www.wheelchairgames.va.gov/).



# Living well

How you manage your chronic condition can make a difference

**A**t the New Jersey War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC), we see veterans with chronic symptoms such as muscle pain, fatigue and headaches, which can be debilitating and difficult to cope with. Our goal is to provide veterans with a “roadmap” for managing these symptoms—and ultimately give them tools to help improve the quality of their lives.

Often there’s no cure for many chronic symptoms, so it’s important for veterans to work at overcoming the physical and emotional problems that can result. Many veterans and their relatives wonder

## Get in control

**F**or more information about self-management or the New Jersey WRIISC medical services for veterans, call **1-800-248-8005**.

if this is a realistic goal. It is, but the key is to consistently practice self-management techniques. Self-management involves more than just following your doctor’s advice: It’s a broad term most simply defined as what you can do to make yourself healthier and happier.

Several self-management strategies are effective for a variety of symptoms (for example, the same strategy might work for pain or fatigue) because they not only reduce symptoms but also help relieve some of the normal but difficult emotions that result from symptoms. These strategies include exercise, healthy eating and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing. Learning to communicate with your doctor more effectively also helps, by keeping you more informed about your health.

You may not have control over chronic health problems, but you can still determine how well you

live. Ultimately, adopting self-management strategies will help you feel more in control and confident in your ability to manage your symptoms and conditions. Most important, self-management helps you maintain and improve your current level of function, regardless of symptoms. ■

## How to begin

**S**elect a self-management strategy that you want to try. Keep in mind that when trying something new, it’s important to set small goals that are attainable. For example, if you want to practice deep breathing to relieve stress, start by saying you’ll do this for five minutes, three days a week, versus every day for a half-hour. You’ll accomplish your goals if they’re realistic and change your life little by little as you go along.



# We need your help

The VA Voluntary Service Program at the VA New Jersey Health Care System has a wide variety of volunteer activities available. The program fulfills a national commitment to care for and enhance the lives of America's veterans.

Our devoted volunteers and corporate participants offer ongoing support to brighten the lives of service members who fought so bravely to preserve our freedom. Many volunteers bring their diverse backgrounds and unique skills to their volunteer assignments, while others bring a

desire to learn and explore, finding the experience beneficial.

Join our team—your volunteer service will be memorable and rewarding. ■



## Volunteer today!

If you're interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Mary Beth Hynoski, Voluntary Service Program Manager at the Lyons campus, at (908) 604-5814. At the East Orange campus, call Tyrone Steed, Voluntary Service Program Manager, at (973) 395-1597.



(From left) Steven Lieberman, M.D., Chief of Staff; Rebecca Connell, M.D., Medical Service; Thelma Madarang, R.N., Patient Care Services; Dennis Quinlan, M.D., Chief, Medical Service; and Kenneth Mizrach, Director, at the ICU grand opening.

## New ICU opens

A new, state-of-the-art Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the East Orange VA Medical Center campus was formally opened in a July 16 ribbon-cutting ceremony. Two years in the making, the nearly \$5 million facility includes an eight-bed medi-

cal ICU and an eight-bed surgical ICU to better serve veterans. ■

### VA NJ Health Care System

[www.eastorange.va.gov](http://www.eastorange.va.gov)  
[www.lyons.va.gov](http://www.lyons.va.gov)

## My Health\_eVet: Better than ever

My Health\_eVet, VA's Web-based portal that allows veterans to refill VA prescriptions, register and record personal health information and access medical information from reliable online health libraries, is enhancing its services.

Recent upgrades include an Active Duty Center for newly discharged veterans, a new calendar option and Military Health System learning modules featuring three online courses developed with the Department of Defense. Additional upgrades enabling veterans to view appointments and lab results for certain tests will be added soon. Veterans will also be able to communicate with their health care providers via secure messaging.

Veterans can register for My Health\_eVet at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), and must then complete an in-person authentication at their medical facility. For a demonstration without registering, enter the following user ID: mhvuser. The password is mhvdemo#1. ■

### Real-time help

If you have questions about My Health\_eVet, contact Kyllene Cox, Patient Health Education Coordinator, at (973) 676-1000, ext. 2876.

# Surviving sexual trauma

VA offers help to veterans who were harassed or assaulted while in the military



**M**ilitary Sexual Trauma (MST), which refers to sexual harassment and sexual assault that occurs in military settings, can damage both physical and mental health. MST is more likely to result in symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder than are most other types of trauma, including combat.

Although MST can affect veterans' mental health in a variety of overt and subtle ways, depression and substance abuse are particularly common. MST can also have severe consequences for physical health and is associated with higher rates of headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, sexual

dysfunction and chronic pain.

About one in five women and one in 100 men have told their VA health care providers that they experienced MST. Although the rates of MST are higher among women, because of the disproportionate ratio of men to women in the military, there are actually more men than women seen in VA who have experienced MST.

## Help is available

At Northport VA Medical Center, veterans (both women and men) are being compassionately screened for MST. Trained providers may ask, "While you were in the military, did you ever experience any unwanted sexual attention, such as remarks, touching or pressure for sexual favors?" or "Did anyone ever use force or the threat of force to have sex with you against your will?"

Veterans who report experiencing any form of MST are asked if they'd like to speak with a trained, caring VA counselor, and a referral is made. ■

## Aftereffects can linger

**M**any men and women who experienced an incident of sexual trauma while they served in the active military have had no professional counseling. They may have never discussed these experiences with anyone. Victims are embarrassed and have legitimate concerns about their confidentiality. Many have moved on in their lives with families and careers. However, they may still experience re-traumatization and have uncomfortable or frightening feelings when they recall the incident.

VA counselors know that people who have been traumatized can be successfully treated and that it is important to the overall health of the victim to talk through these upsetting and terrifying experiences.

**Northport VAMC**

[www.northport.va.gov](http://www.northport.va.gov)

## Talk about it

**I**f you experienced MST, consult your primary care doctor or social worker, or call James Leatham, Northport VA Medical Center's MST coordinator, at (631) 261-4400, ext. 7047.

# We're here for you

Call the following Northport VA Medical Center staff members to get medical care or support if you're a returning combat veteran (includes active duty reservists, guardsmen and recently discharged veterans):



**Vanessa J. Brown, R.N.,  
B.S.N.**

OEF/OIF Program  
Manager  
**OFFICE: (631) 261-4400,  
ext. 2173**  
**CELL: (631) 774-1707**



**Gillian Rooney, LMSW**

Combat Veterans  
Case Manager  
**OFFICE: (631) 261-4400,  
ext. 5803**  
**CELL: (631) 831-0481**



**Kathy Washburn**

Transitional Patient  
Advocate  
**OFFICE: (631) 261-4400,  
ext. 5273**  
**CELL: (631) 774-4704**

## Veterans helping veterans



**M**ake a difference in your fellow veterans' lives by becoming a volunteer driver with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Transportation Program at Northport VA Medical Center. Volunteers use DAV vans to transport patients to and from their medical center appointments. To volunteer, call (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183 or 7182. ■

## Were you exposed to Agent Orange?



**I**n 1978, VA established an Agent Orange Registry Examination Program to identify Vietnam veterans concerned about Agent Orange exposure. VA maintains a computerized registry of data from these examinations, and registrants receive periodic updates on Agent Orange studies and VA policy.

As with other veterans, Vietnam veterans with disabilities incurred or aggravated by military service may receive monthly VA compensation. As knowledge has grown from studies of Agent Orange, some diseases that may not have become evident in service have been recognized as service-connected. The following

are now on VA's Agent Orange list: chloracne, Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, porphyria cutanea tarda, respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx and trachea), soft-tissue sarcoma, acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy, chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL), prostate cancer and adult-onset diabetes. To schedule an Agent Orange Registry exam at the Northport VA Medical Center, call (631) 261-4400, ext. 2655 and ask for the Agent Orange Coordinator. ■





# Managing chronic disease

Special program can help you cope—and improve your health

BY CHARLENE STOKAMER, M.P.H., M.S.N.

**A**re you a veteran living with a chronic condition such as arthritis, heart problems, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, an enlarged prostate, diabetes or HIV? Chronic conditions can't be cured, but you can learn to manage them. One way to do so is by enrolling in the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program now being offered by VA.

The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, developed by Stanford University, is a two-and-a-half-hour workshop led by trained instructors and held once a week for six weeks. Participating veterans with chronic health problems attend together and learn how to actively manage their conditions. They do so by setting goals and developing action plans with small steps so they can achieve something each week.

Topics covered in the workshops may include:

- techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain and isolation
- appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility and endurance
- appropriate use of medications
- communicating effectively with family, friends and health professionals
- nutrition
- how to evaluate new treatments

Participants also learn how to relax—and they learn from sharing with each other. This builds confidence in their ability to manage their health and maintain active and fulfilling lives.

## Tools for living

After taking charge of their health, veterans in the program report feeling better. They're active, more positive and less afraid of the future. "We came here with problems and we're leaving with tools to manage

our problems," says one participant. Others say class time "just flies by."

Veterans must pre-register for the program. Each participant receives a book, "Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions," and a relaxation CD. The program is for veterans who live with any chronic disease and are able to participate in a group program. Spouses, partners or caregivers may also attend.

Stanford University has licensed VA New York Harbor Health Care System, VA Northport, Hudson Valley Health Care System and VA New Jersey Health Care System to offer the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. ■

## Take control

**F**or more information about this and other health education programs, call Charlene Stokamer, M.P.H., M.S.N., at (212) 686-7500, ext. 4218.

# Sharing with Iraq

## Conference—and surgery—brings VA neurosurgeon to Ramadi

BY MICHAEL E. CAREY, M.D., AND KELLI COOK

A neurosurgeon with VA New York Harbor Health Care System was among physicians who attended the Al Anbar Province health conference held July 28–31, 2008, in Ramadi, Iraq. Sponsored jointly by the U.S. Department of State and the director of health for Al Anbar Province, the conference was the first in more than five years to include both foreign and Iraqi physicians.

More than 100 Iraqi doctors from Anbar Province attended the conference, which included remarks by the Anbar health director, Ahmed Ibrahim al Salih, M.D., and the mayor of Ramadi. Iraqi physicians discussed the state of

neurosurgery, cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, obstetrics and gynecology in Ramadi.

Michael E. Carey, M.D., chief of neurosurgery at VA New York Harbor Health Care System, discussed modern concepts in the treatment of brain trauma—a major neurosurgical problem in Ramadi. Dr. Carey, assisted by Iraqi neurosurgeons, also operated on two Iraqi patients with brain tumors.

Patricia Kavanagh, M.D., of SUNY Downstate Medical Center

in Brooklyn, N.Y., lectured on stroke, seizures, substance abuse emergencies, current genetics research and neurologic

causes of falls. She also participated in rounds at Ramadi Women's and Children's Hospital.

“In Ramadi and all of Anbar, there's no prenatal care and no ability to care for very sick infants,” she observes. “Years later, young children will come to medical attention with conditions that could have been prevented or cured before or right after birth.”

Dr. Carey was impressed by his Iraqi counterparts, who handle more than 250 neurosurgical cases a year in Ramadi. “The Iraqi neurosurgeons are very knowledgeable and technically excellent,” he says. “They're woefully deficient in facilities and equipment, however. Hopefully, this conference will give health administrators here the impetus to get their facilities better equipped and more up-to-date.” ■

**“The Iraqi neurosurgeons are...technically excellent.”**

**Michael E. Carey, M.D.**



At the health conference in Ramadi, Iraq, are Michael E. Carey, M.D. (left), and Patricia Kavanagh, M.D., with Derwint “Buck” Daniel, deputy health attaché for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

**VA NY Harbor Health Care System**

[www.brooklyn.va.gov](http://www.brooklyn.va.gov)

[www.manhattan.va.gov](http://www.manhattan.va.gov)

[www.stalbans.va.gov](http://www.stalbans.va.gov)

# Competitive edge

BY COLLEEN ROONEY

## Wheelchair Games give veterans a chance to connect

**VA** Hudson Valley Health Care System's Crusaders were ready for another action-packed summer when they headed off to Omaha, Neb., for the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The theme of this year's Games was "Quest for the Best."

What began in Richmond, Va., in 1981 with 74 competitors has now grown into an event involving more than 500 competitors each year. Basketball, swimming, air rifle and wheelchair slalom are among the 17 competitions featured at the Games.

Besides being a great therapeutic outlet, the Games give athletes a chance to see old friends in a new city every year, which helps ease the stress of being wheelchair-bound. Competing also gives them a chance to connect with other

veterans, and strong friendships often result.

### Remembering colleagues

For two of Hudson Valley's Crusaders, Joe DeWeever and Caleb Smith, this is their sixth and seventh time, respectively, competing. For Joe, the competitiveness is the main reason he loves going to the Games each year. "Seeing friends from other VAs is also a big reason for going to the Games," he says.

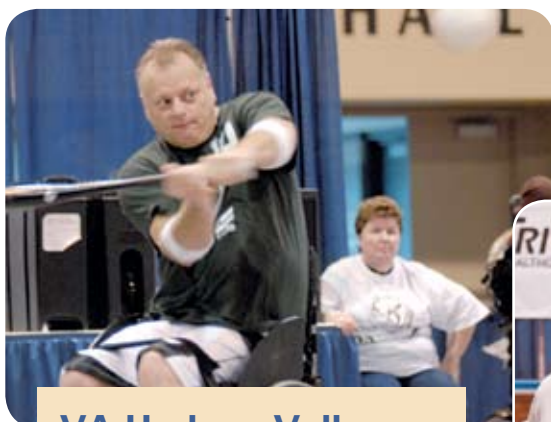
The Crusaders dedicated this year's Games to two teammates who died earlier this year. They had contributed much time and won many medals for the team. In the opening ceremony, the Crusaders carried a banner proclaiming, "New York dedicates 2008 Wheelchair Games in memory of their fallen teammates."

### Finding inspiration

Caleb and Joe were inspired to participate in the Games by their coach, Ellen Varian. Joe says he didn't know about the Games—or even his veterans' benefits—until he was approached by Ellen. She encouraged him and he began competing in Long Beach, Calif., five years ago. "If it wasn't for her, we would be lost," says Caleb. "What inspires the Games, for us, is her."

This year the team won 23 medals—eight gold, seven silver and nine bronze.

VA and Paralyzed Veterans of America co-sponsor the annual Games. VA Hudson Valley athletes, who rely on financial donations from civic and Veteran Service Organizations to fund their trips, are extremely grateful for the continued support. ■



**VA Hudson Valley Health Care System**

[www.hudsonvalley.va.gov](http://www.hudsonvalley.va.gov)

[www.castlepoint.va.gov](http://www.castlepoint.va.gov)

[www.montrose.va.gov](http://www.montrose.va.gov)

◀ Joe DeWeever, an Air Force veteran from Newburgh, N.Y., competes in softball at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

▼ Navy veteran Edward Horvat of Wappingers Falls, N.Y., prepares to take a shot in the nine-ball event.



▲ Army veteran Donald Plunkett of New Windsor, N.Y., competes in a race at the Wheelchair Games.





▲ Optometrist William O'Connell, O.D. (standing), shows veteran Robert Allen how to use a lighted hand-held magnifier to read.

◀ O'Connell assists Allen with another low-vision portable device.

# The eyes have it

## Low-vision services are expanded

**T**hanks to an initiative by VA, low-vision rehabilitation services are now available to veterans in the Hudson Valley. The VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System (VAHVHCS) Optometry Program is actually among the first in the country to expand low-vision services. What makes the program unique is that care for low vision will be offered at most clinic sites, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics, via a mobile unit.

Low vision is any reduction of vision that can't be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses.

Among the causes of low vision are macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, glaucoma, optic atrophy and the ocular effects of stroke or traumatic brain injury.

Low vision makes daily activities difficult. It's hard to read, write, watch TV or walk if you can't see well. Many veterans who visit the optometry clinics need specialty services to maintain their independence and improve safety. At the clinics, the staff carefully assesses a patient's vision and designs an individualized rehabilitation program based on the patient's goals and visual needs.

### Ways to adapt

Visually impaired veterans are trained to use a combination of adaptive techniques and tools. They may need new eyeglass prescriptions, specialized eyewear for glare protection or low-vision devices such as hand and stand magnifiers, microscopic eyeglass lenses or electronic magnifiers. Modifying the lighting in a patient's home or workplace may help. Vision therapy may also be prescribed.

The low-vision staff includes William O'Connell, O.D., an optometrist with more than 30 years of experience in low-vision rehabilitation. Working with him is Ron Texley, a low-vision rehabilitation specialist who is a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Karen Byrnes, program assistant, manages appointments. ■

### See here!

If you think you're a candidate for low-vision services, call your primary care provider.

# Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

## **Bronx**

*Medical Center:*  
130 West Kingsbridge Road  
Bronx, NY 10468  
(718) 584-9000

*Community Clinics:*  
23 South Broadway  
White Plains, NY 10601  
(914) 421-1951

124 New Main Street  
Yonkers, NY 10701  
(914) 375-8055

41-03 Queens Boulevard  
Sunnyside, NY 11104  
(718) 741-4800

953 Southern Boulevard  
Bronx, NY 10459  
(718) 741-4900

## **VA New York Harbor Health Care System**

*Medical Centers:*  
Brooklyn Campus  
800 Poly Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11209  
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus  
423 East 23rd Street  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and Extended  
Care Center  
179th Street & Linden Boulevard  
St. Albans, NY 11425  
(718) 526-1000

*Community Clinics:*  
40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
(718) 439-4300

1150 South Avenue  
3rd Floor—Suite 301  
Staten Island, NY 10314  
(718) 761-2973

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor  
New York, NY 10027  
(646) 273-8125

## **VA New Jersey Health Care System**

*Medical Centers:*  
East Orange Campus  
385 Tremont Avenue  
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095  
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus  
151 Knollcroft Road  
Lyons, NJ 07939  
(908) 647-0180

*Community Clinics:*  
970 Route 70  
Brick, NJ 08724  
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—Suite 2A  
Elizabeth, NJ 07206  
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36  
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425  
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue  
Hackensack, NJ 07601  
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive  
Jersey City, NJ 07302  
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
(732) 729-0646

340 West Hanover Avenue  
Morristown, NJ 07960  
(973) 539-9791  
(973) 539-9794

20 Washington Place  
Newark, NJ 07102  
(973) 645-1441

Patterson Army Health Clinic  
Stephenson Avenue—Building 1075  
Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703  
(732) 532-4500

275 Getty Avenue  
Paterson, NJ 07503  
(973) 247-1666

## **VA Hudson Valley Health Care System**

*Medical Centers:*  
Montrose Campus  
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100  
Montrose, NY 10548-0100  
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus  
Castle Point, NY 12511  
(845) 831-2000

*Community Clinics:*  
Jefferson Professional Plaza  
60 Jefferson Street  
Unit 3  
Monticello, NY 12701  
(845) 791-4936

150 Pike Street  
Port Jervis, NY 12771  
(845) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard—  
Suite 400  
New City, NY 10956  
(845) 634-8942

30 Hatfield Lane—  
Suite 204  
Goshen, NY 10924  
(845) 294-6927

488 Freedom Plains Road  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603  
(845) 452-5151

1875 Route 6  
Warwick Savings Bank—  
2nd Floor  
Carmel, NY 10512  
(845) 228-5291

2881 Church Street  
Route 199  
Pine Plains, NY 12567  
(518) 398-9240

## **Northport (Long Island)**

*Medical Center:*  
79 Middleville Road  
Northport, NY 11768  
(631) 261-4400

*Community Clinics:*  
4 Phyllis Drive  
Patchogue, NY 11772  
(631) 758-4419

1425 Old Country Road  
Plainview, NY 11803  
(516) 694-6008

Westhampton Air Base  
(by appointment only)  
150 Old Riverhead Road  
Westhampton, NY 11978  
(631) 898-0599

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service  
Network 3  
130 W. Kingsbridge Road  
VISN Office  
Bronx, NY 10468

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

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