



VA
HEALTH
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Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Bonne Santé

Spring 2012

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System



Project Legacy gets things moving,
pages 4-6

LEADING CHANGE

Robvais wins award

By Kimberly Gearhart



Police Sgt. Rodney Robvais has been named VA Lead Police Officer of the Year for a large facility.

Robvais is a Baton Rouge native who graduated from Louisiana State University in 1992 and joined the Louisiana 19th Judicial District Drug Court in Baton Rouge as a court support officer shortly thereafter. He spent over 15 years working in various court positions, including working in the drug court.

“I’d always wanted to be a police officer, so in 1994 I became a sworn reserve police officer with the Baton Rouge Police Department,” Robvais said.

As such, he often saw both sides of many cases, giving him a unique understanding of both the law and the individuals involved.

In December 2007, Robvais was hired as a VA Police Officer at SLVHCS. He was promoted to lead police officer in February of 2011. Less than a year later, Robvais is Lead Police Officer of the Year, a fast progression that does not surprise his colleagues.



VA Police Lt. Samuel Alexander, who nominated Robvais, feels that Robvais’ experience gives him “several characteristics” that make him a great police officer.

“He is trustworthy and is always seeking to improve his skills. I’ve watched Rodney mentor and inspire others to take action. Leaders inspire others,” Alexander said.

Robvais was nominated for several innovative police and security trainings and policies, including creating a comprehensive operating procedure for providing services at geographically separate locations, which subsequently became the model for other clinics within the system.

According to his coworkers, Robvais’ biggest strength lies in his customer service skills and personality. Veterans are comfortable talking to him and his colleagues follow his lead.

Robvais previously won Police Officer of the Year for a large facility and is now being recognized as a lead police officer.



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On the Cover

Surcharging is underway at the site of the new medical center.

Photo by Amanda Jones

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Veterans serving Veterans *Hill swears in...again*

By Kimberly Gearhart



Kimberly Gearhart

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System's Suicide Prevention Coordinator Dr. William Hill swore in as a member of the Air Force Reserves Feb. 7 in a ceremony at 3500 Canal Street in New Orleans.

Hill was given the Oath of Enlistment by Chief of Mental Health Dr. Dean Robinson, who happens to be a colonel in the Air Force Reserves.

"There are so many Veterans and reservists working in SLVHCS," Hill said. "We are Veterans serving Veterans. It was an honor to be sworn in by my boss."

Hill was commissioned as a captain and will serve as an operational psychologist.

"I enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1998 ... and was mobilized after the September 11, 2001, attacks," Hill said. "At the time I was in graduate school."

His university and his unit helped Hill complete his coursework around his military obligation, and in 2005 he accepted a direct commission into the Air Force.

It was while he was in the Army that Hill became interested in the mental health profession.

"I noticed in basic training that the soldiers who succeeded were those who told themselves positive thoughts. Those who engaged in negative thinking tended to do poorly. I thought that was fascinating," Hill explained.

Hill went to school, using his GI Bill benefits, to

"learn more about how our thoughts and behaviors impact our feelings," he said. "The Army and the Air Force paid for my education."

After returning from a tour in Afghanistan in 2010, Hill left the military and joined SLVHCS.

"I wanted to come home to the Gulf Coast and be a part of rebuilding the city I love. I can't imagine living anywhere other than New Orleans," Hill said.

But he soon began to miss the opportunities the military had to offer and decided to join the reserves.

"I get the best of both the civilian and military worlds. I serve my fellow Veterans at VA and also enjoy the experiences that only the military can provide," Hill explained.

As an operational psychologist, Hill will help develop and implement programs to reduce training wash-outs in high-stress, high-demand military occupations. He will also help identify human factors in accidents and failed missions.

"We can help design procedures to prevent failures in future missions," Hill said.

Hill will also work with former prisoners of war and hostages, helping them reintegrate after their captivity.

"This is quite different from the clinical psychology at VA, but that's what is so great about the reserves. It really is a chance to do something completely different," Hill said.

PROJECT LEGACY

BUILDING HEALTH CARE



HONORING VETERANS



KEEPING THE PROMISE



Amanda Jones

On February 22, construction contractors began unloading sand at the construction site of the \$995 million VA medical center to prepare the site for pile driving. This process, called surcharging, uses the weight of the sand to push water out of the ground, compressing it to reduce the settlement of any structure subsequently built. In the first phase of surcharging, Clark McCarthy Healthcare Partners, in a joint venture with Louisiana firms Woodward Design + Build and Landis Construction Company, will distribute the sand, build protective berms and create a drainage system. This phase of surcharging should take approximately six months.



Amanda Jones



Amanda Jones



Karen Collins

Four shotgun houses from the neighborhood are being repurposed as part of the final design for the new medical center. On March 14, the houses were temporarily moved so that the area could be surcharged. Wick drains (photos at right) are also inserted into the ground to draw water out and assist with soil compaction. The wicks are inserted into the ground, then manually cut from the roll.



Karen Collins



Karen Collins

Wick drains, such as this one, are inserted into the ground to draw water out and assist with soil compaction.

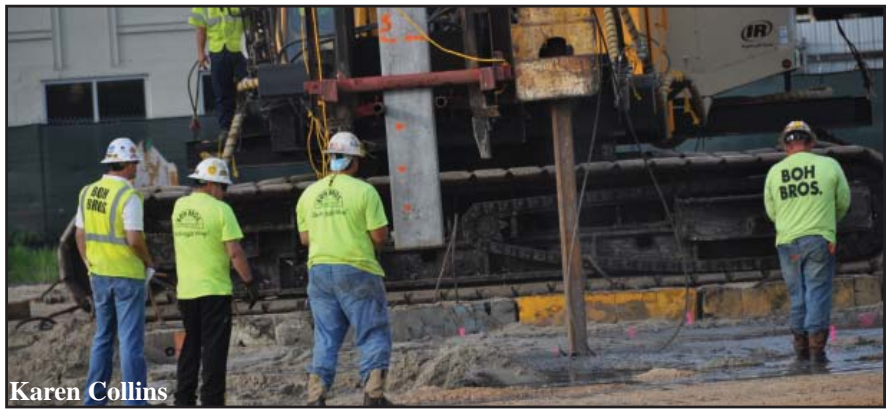




Karen Collins



Karen Collins



Karen Collins



Karen Collins

On March 19, 2012, construction contractors began pile driving for the new central energy plant. Seven hundred and fifty-three foundation piles will be placed for the CEP. Each concrete pile consists of two sections that are stacked with interlocking joints (top) for a total depth of approximately 150 feet. Each hole is predrilled to 100 feet to minimize vibrations (middle). Each section of the piles are also leveled (bottom) before driving begins (left).

Shared appointments keep Veterans healthy

By Kimberly Gearhart



Licensed Practical Nurse Bridget Taylor, right, talks with Veteran Lynn Brouillette during a shared medical appointment.

As part of its efforts to increase patient access and satisfaction, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is now offering shared medical appointments (SMAs) for Veterans with specific medical diagnoses.

During SMAs, eight to 12 diabetic patients and their family members are invited to a group meeting, during which they can discuss their successes, ask questions, and meet with various specialists as well as their primary care provider.

“This is an innovative alternative to the traditional one-on-one patient/doctor visit,” said Ladonna Yankowsky, a registered nurse on Dr. Grace Chen’s Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) in Baton

Rouge. “Our clinic focuses on Veterans with diabetes.”

“Usually we would see our patients two or three times a year, and Dr. Chen felt that just wasn’t enough to help keep our patients stable,” Yankowsky said. By scheduling one monthly group meeting, rather than several individual 20-30 minute appointments, Chen’s team is able to monitor high-risk patients while still maintaining open access to appointments for other patients.

“Seeing the doctor every month is a real help,” said Vietnam Veteran Ben Williams, who served in the U.S. Army from 1967-1975. “I’ve been doing this for four or five months and every time I come, I learn a little more.”

Podiatrists, nutritionists and ophthalmologists join the team during SMAs to address Veterans’ concerns and answer questions without the need for scheduling consult appointments, creating a more convenient treatment option for the patients.

Each SMA is different, covering Veteran-driven topics in addition to

basic health check-ins.

“I’ve had to learn to stop preparing for a lecture,” said Registered Dietitian Aggie Domino. “I arrive with a topic in mind, but every month my role varies. It all depends on what the Veterans are concerned with that day.”

As the Veterans become more comfortable with the group setting, they begin to open up and ask more questions, Williams said.

“We talk a lot on the side and sometimes it triggers more questions for the doctors. I went through a lot with my diabetes before I learned to control it. I can share that experience with the others and tell them what not to do,” he added.

Yankowsky said, “They share their personal experiences to encourage and support one another. This is truly a patient-centered clinic.”

“I went through a lot with my diabetes before I learned to control it. I can share that experience with the others and tell them what not to do.”
Ben Williams
Vietnam Veteran

DASH your way to lower blood pressure

By Kimberly Gearhart

The National Heart, Lung and Blood

Institute (NHLBI) estimates that one in four American adults has high blood pressure; that number jumps to three in four for those 65 and older.

That's the bad news.

The good news is...

...high blood pressure can be controlled, sometimes without medication, by changes to your diet.

Hypertension is defined as consistently high blood pressure measuring 140/90 mmHG or higher, and once you've been diagnosed, chances are you will continue to be hypertensive for the rest of your life. If you don't get it under control, that may not be as long as you'd like.

"Hypertension is related to heart disease and stroke. Directly related," said Dr. Vecihi Batuman, Medicine Service chief for Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

However, hypertension can be controlled once it's discovered.

"We in the VA do a better job than private practitioners in helping our patients control their hypertension," Dr. Batuman said, noting that nationally, only one in three hypertension patients are considered to have "controlled" blood pressure (less than 140/90). In the VA, it is three in four.

"Hypertension is determined or checked at every encounter," he added.

By checking regularly, VA providers are able to head off problems early, possibly contributing to the high success rate of VA patients in controlling their hypertension.

Control measures generally begin with lifestyle changes to diet and exercise. The VA uses the Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension, or DASH, diet.



Kimberly Gearhart

Seasoning with items such as almond slivers and citrus, like in this low-sodium rice dish, allows Veterans to eat healthy food without sacrificing variety or flavor.

"DASH is based on a clinical study that found that high blood pressure can be reduced with an eating plan rich in fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy," said Registered Dietitian Trionne Burrell.

Reducing cholesterol, fat and salt intake is critical.

"Salt and fat intake tends to be higher in Louisiana," Batuman said, noting that Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida are known as the 'stroke belt' due to high obesity and blood pressure rates.

Veterans can substitute other herbs, spices and even grocery items to gain flavor without adding salt, said Chief of Nutrition and Food Services Pat Skinner.

"Citrus adds great flavor."

"Shopping the outer perimeter of the grocery store for fresh produce, lean meat and low fat dairy sets the stage for good nutrition. Processed foods are often high in sodium," Burrell said. She also cautioned to avoid pickled, smoked and cured items.

By following the DASH diet, limiting alcohol intake and becoming more physically active, patients with mild to moderate hypertension can get their blood pressure under control without necessarily needing medication. As a bonus, the diet is also good for those seeking to lose weight and keep it off, according to the NHLBI.

"Start small and make gradual changes; you will be able to continue for a lifetime," Burrell said.

For more information, go to <http://www.pbrc.edu/pdf/PNS-dash.pdf>.

Volunteering makes a difference

By Debra Ceaser-Winbush

Every April, we celebrate National Volunteer Week to say thank you to our fantastic volunteers for their gifts of time, talent and acts of kindness to our Veterans.

In FY 2011, SLVHCS had 96 regularly scheduled volunteers working with staff and Veterans in various services throughout our system. These volunteers contributed a combined total of 28,912 hours of service, amounting to a savings of \$617,560.32 in staff expenses. Since the start of the new fiscal year, we have added 22 volunteers who are eager to devote their time to our Veterans and staff.

“Having volunteers makes a world of a difference,”

said Slidell Clinic Manager Richard Breaux. “A welcoming and smiling face upon entry automatically gives a sense of caring and initiates a good visit.”

Everything our volunteers do has an effect on patient care, from the volunteer coffee servers who get up early every morning to make sure coffee is prepared and served on time, to the lobby greeters who welcome the Veterans with a smile and show them where to go. SLVHCS has a very special group of caring volunteers.

“It makes my day to get off the elevator and see the smiling faces of our volunteers greeting and directing our patients to their locations in the clinics,” said New Orleans Clinic Manager Stacy Valenti. “They are a cherished part of our organization.”

To become a SLVHCS volunteer, contact our Volunteer Service office at (504) 565-4857 or (504) 565-4859 and get started today!

Congratulations to our 2011 volunteers of the year: Benevolent & Protective Order of the Elks, Lodge #30 SLVHCS

Jackie Cromwell
New Orleans

George Edmondson
Baton Rouge

Shelby Bland
Hammond

Dana Bergeron
Houma

Wallace Roberson
Franklin

Ernest Hoitt
St. John

Debra Miller
Slidell Clinic



VA Volunteer Service committee held a bake sale and country store in the 1601 Perdido Street lobby Friday, March 31, to raise funds for the coffee program.

Our volunteers came together to share their chocolates, pralines, cakes and cracklins with patients and staff. In addition to the great edibles, many customers strolled away with books, crafts and holiday decorations.

Every participant and contribution is greatly appreciated. All money raised will help support the coffee program.

How to Manage health care from home

SLVHCS offers several ways to manage health care from home. One new way is VA pilot program Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC).

TLC helps you work on health goals that are important for you with the help of a coach and the support of your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT).

This program helps you live a healthier lifestyle by focusing on one or more of the following six areas:

- Strive for a healthy weight
- Be tobacco free
- Be physically active
- Eat wisely
- Limit alcohol
- Manage stress

You chose what areas you want to focus on with this program.

How Telephone Lifestyle Coaching Works

1 Primary Care/PACT Visit: Health Behavior Change/TLC Discussion



2 TLC Consult and Enrollment Process

- TLC coach receives CPRS consult
- Coach calls Veteran at preferred day/time/phone number
- Coach and Veteran complete the enrollment call and schedule the first coaching call
- Coach completes the consult and documents in CPRS

3 Active Participation TLC

- Veteran completes a total of 10 scheduled coaching calls over several months
 - Weekly for first 3 calls
 - Bi-weekly to monthly for remaining 7 calls
- Veteran may call coach as needed
- Coach and Veteran discuss options and make arrangements for follow-up and ongoing support after participation has ended.
- Veteran completes a final evaluation call

4 Active Participation Completed

- Veteran may choose to continue working toward goals or a maintenance program.
- Veteran may choose to have support from the health care team, the community, family or others.

by phone and computer

By Sandra Terrebonne



Karen Collins

New My HealtheVet kiosks make signing up easy!

My HealtheVet is the gateway to Veteran health benefits and services, providing access to trusted health information, links to VA and other federal benefits and resources, the Personal Health Journal, and now online VA prescription refills.

Managing your health information - appointments, prescriptions, labs, blood tests and even exchanging messages with your health care team - has never been easier with My HealtheVet, according to Gweneh Vilo, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention program coordinator, who is also a point of contact for MyHeatheVet.

With the blue button feature, Veterans can package health records into a single file to safely share with doctors, nurses, clinicians, and even family members.

Now secure messaging can be used to email a

request for an appointment at your VA facility, renew VA medications, and make address changes. Secure messaging can also be used to ask your primary care team questions, offering benefits to both patients and providers. Patients are more in control of their care, and can enjoy the personalized attention from their provider. For the provider, this access improves the patient/provider collaboration by increasing the opportunities for information sharing.

“Secure messaging minimizes ‘telephone tag,’ saves time and streamlines record keeping,” said Vilo.





Volunteer Jackie Cromwell, right, gives beads to a veteran to celebrate Valentines for Veterans in February.



Disabled American Veterans Chapter 23 members present donations for the patient coffee program.

New: personalized handbooks shipping out

VA is producing a new, personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook for Veterans enrolled in any VA health care system. National rollout of the handbook began in early February and is being distributed according to priority group, beginning with priority group 1. The handbooks are tailored to each Veteran, providing our nation's heroes with a current and understandable description of their eligibility and health care benefits, to include the following:

- personalized eligibility and health benefits info
- local VA facility contact info
- appointment scheduling process
- guidelines for treatments
- Veteran responsibilities, including co-payments (if applicable)