



VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTH CARE NETWORK • VISN 6

Vol. 2, No. 4

“Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here”

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

January 31, 2012

Durham Breaks Ground On New Greenville Clinic

By Pete Tillman
Durham VAMC public affairs

The Durham VAMC broke ground on the new Greenville VA Outpatient Clinic Jan. 12. The 116,000 square foot clinic will provide primary and specialty care to Veterans living in eastern NC. Currently, those Veterans travel to the Durham VA clinic for most treatment.

Program participants included U.S. Reps. Walter B. Jones and G.K. Butterfield, Dr. Paul Cunningham, Dean, Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, James Kladis, president, Pitt County Veterans Council, VISN 6 Network Director Daniel Hoffmann and Durham VAMC Director Ralph T. Gigliotti. Several hundred people attended the event.

“This is a very important expansion for the Durham VA Healthcare System,” said Gigliotti, who gave the welcoming remarks. “It represents a significant step forward in our journey to provide specialty

care closer to where Veterans live. Many of these Veterans travel countless miles to access specialty care in Durham. Come 2014, Veterans needing cardiology, audiology, women’s health care, dental care, eye care, and many other special services, including minor procedures, will be able to access them in Greenville.”

Congressman Jones said the day was special “for the Veterans of Eastern North Carolina who have earned the care and attention that this facility will provide. I am grateful for the many people who have worked to make this clinic a reality, but more importantly,” the congressman said, “I am grateful for our men and women in uniform. It is time we repay those who gave so much for our country.”

Director Hoffman, the keynote speaker, thanked Congressmen Butterfield and Jones for their “consistent support of VA health care efforts in Greenville, and indeed, in Eastern



Linnie Skidmore

L-R: Dr. Paul Cunningham, James Kladis, Congressman Walter B. Jones, Congressman G. K. Butterfield, Ralph Gigliotti, Daniel Hoffmann, Tim Wipperman, Ed Broderick and Mayor Allen Thomas scoop a ceremonial shovel of dirt at the ceremony.

North Carolina.”

The Greenville clinic, Hoffman said, will be the largest VA outpatient clinic in the

[Continued on Pg 5](#)

Gigliotti To Lead Rocky Mountain Network

Ralph T. Gigliotti has been selected to become the network director for VA’s Rocky Mountain Network, VISN 19, which includes VA facilities in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming and Utah. Gigliotti has served as director of the Durham VAMC since June 2005.

“The highest honor I have had in my professional career has been to be your medical center director,” wrote Gigliotti in an e-mail to Durham VAMC staff announcing his departure in March. “The care we provide to our nation’s heroes is second to none.”

A native of Pennsylvania, Gigliotti holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Wittenberg University and a

Master’s of Health Service Administration from Central Michigan University. Gigliotti joined the VA in 1983 as an assistant canteen officer and has served in a variety of positions in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Colorado, and North Carolina. He is no stranger to the Rocky Mountain Region, having served as the associate director of the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System in Denver for seven years prior to being appointed as the director at Durham.

Gigliotti said he and his family “enjoyed being a part of this special community and will always have a special place in our heart for Durham.” He also thanked Durham VAMC staff



for providing that ‘world class’ care to our Veterans and wished them well.

Gigliotti will transfer to Colorado in March where he will replace Mr. Glen Grippen, who is retiring after 40 years of distinguished VA service.

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VISN 6 Sites of Care with addresses and phone numbers for each location.

From the Director

Community Partnerships Key to Success

During the last year, I have shared a great deal of information about how this network has improved access to VA health care. I talked about the expansion in terms of brick and mortar, the free standing outpatient clinics that bring VA health care closer to where Veterans live, and I've also talked a lot about leveraging technology such as the Home Telehealth program in use today by more than 4,000 of our area Veterans. We have dedicated many past newsletters to explaining how these new tools provide unprecedented access. This month, I'd like to share some of what is going on behind the scenes with building community partnerships that will make a difference in so many lives.

VA continues to evolve. We have learned from the past. We know that Veterans' issues affect their families and communities. We also know that the sooner we can provide help, the quicker Veterans can successfully leave combat experiences in the past and move on with their lives in the most productive fashion possible. To this end, we are working hard to ensure all Veterans get the care they deserve and we are making special efforts to ensure we engage America's newest generation of Veterans as quickly as possible.

We know that 52 percent of the 1.3 million who have served in OEF/OIF/OND have sought VA care. Our concern is where are the other 48 percent? Do they know how to contact us? Do they want or need our help? Are they comfortable seeking assistance?

Many Veterans seek care outside of DoD and VA, but in a recently published study, "Serving those who have Served," we found that the majority of community providers do not ask their patients about past military service; that less than 20 percent of the providers have themselves served in uniform; and most importantly, that few community providers know how to refer a Veteran for VA medical or mental health services.

While most Veterans will not develop a mental illness or traumatic brain injury, all Veterans and their families face important readjustment issues that we have studied and are uniquely qualified to deal with.

There's no doubt that access to VA care has been a challenge, but the steps we have taken over the past decade have made dramatic progress with this issue. A challenge which we are now focusing on is that of educating communities, local health care providers, civic and faith-based organizations, how to identify Veteran specific issues such as PTSD, and how to get Veterans linked to VHA where they can receive the care from the organization that has the greatest experience and success in providing it.

For several years now, my staff has met with state and local agencies, non-profits, faith-based, and medical organizations, working to develop a seamless set of resources focused on helping Veterans. We are working to build a system of interagency communication and coordination unlike any that has ever been devel-



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Questions or comments about the newsletter, e-mail Bruce Sprecher@va.gov or call 919-956-5541.



Daniel F. Hoffmann, Network Director
Augustin Davila, Deputy Network Director
Mark Shelhorse M.D., Chief Medical Officer
Bruce Sprecher, Director, Public Affairs
Steve Wilkins, Network Public Affairs
Jeffery Melvin, Network Public Affairs
Patrick W. Schuetz, Newsletter Editor



Amanda Stanislaw

Chairman's Wife Visits Durham

Deanie Dempsey, wife of Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, gets a demonstration of a rotary chair, one of the diagnostic tools used by Durham VAMC Audiology Clinic staff to care for Veterans. Mrs. Dempsey, a strong advocate for military and Veterans, visited Durham VAMC Jan. 13. She toured the facility and learned about innovative research conducted in post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. She also learned about the Millennium Cohort Family Study which is exploring how being in the military affects relationships within the family as well as family health.

oped. We are bringing leaders and users together to engineer DoD/VA/State and community partnerships that will be capable of serving the greatest numbers of Veterans in the most efficient, effective manner possible.

For example, in North Carolina, we are partnered with the Governor's Focus on Returning Veterans and their families (www.veteransfocus.org), and in Virginia, we are collaborating with the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (<http://wearevirginiaveterans.org/About-Us.aspx>). Working with both these organizations, we exchange information about respective agencies assets and goals; identify strategic partnerships and work to optimize access to information, support and clinical services.

Our ultimate goal is to transform post deployment health for all service members, Veterans and their families so that there should be NO WRONG DOOR in any community to which any service member, Veteran or family member can turn to for help.

This is a huge undertaking, and while it will take time to mature, we are well on our way to making it a reality. As these partnerships have their foundation in the very bedrock of each community, it is up to every one of us to ensure the word gets out.

If you know a Veteran who has not enrolled for VA health care, do them a favor and steer them our way. Contact numbers for all our clinics are on Page 12, or they can call (877) 222-8387.

We stand ready to provide, Excellent Service...Earned by Vets...Delivered Here.

Sincerely, Dan Hoffmann



Debbie Voloski

Robert Erwin, who served in the Army during World War II as a paratrooper and fought in the Battle of the Bulge, is surrounded by members of his home based primary care team. Paula Boothe, social worker; Tony Cline, dietician; Robert Erwin; John Sauls, nurse and Tina Halterman, nurse practitioner.

Beckley VAMC staff provides excellent care

In January 1997, I had a heart attack. My family doctor was out of town, so I told my wife to take me to the Veterans Administration hospital in Beckley.

As soon as we arrived at this medical center, the emergency room staff began treating me immediately, saving my life.

After a few days of treatment and tests, I was sent to the VA McGuire Hospital in Richmond, Va., for a heart catheterization to determine the damage done by the heart attack. This procedure showed several blockages and the chief surgeon recommended open-heart surgery, which was performed after a four-day treatment to strengthen my heart for the operation.

After recovering from the surgery, I was discharged and sent back to the Beckley VA. Before leaving, I was told that I would be in "good hands" with Dr. Reneva, a very good cardiologist. How true this was. While I was at both hospitals, I was well taken care of by all the doctors, nurses, attendants and everyone in all departments. I can never repay all these nice people for all they did and are still doing for me. So by writing this letter, I might convey to them my "heart-felt" appreciation for a job well done.

I would urge all veterans to register and take advantage of these excellent services at your veterans medical center.

When I wrote this article 14 years ago, I thought the Beckley VA Medical Center could not do any better for me, but I was wrong. They now have what they call Home Based Primary Care Staff. The following members have visited me at home in a very nice way. Dr. Santos, physician, Linda Hicks, RN, Matthew Becktel, PT, John Sauls, RN, Paula Booth, social worker, and Ann Honaker, care giver.

I am now 90 years old and with these nice people, they will make my final days worth living for.

Robert F. Erwin
Daniels

Team River Runner Brings Asheville Veterans Together

By Dennis Mehring
Asheville VAMC public affairs

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines go to war as part of a team that helps them cope with the pressures of combat and complete their assigned missions. When they come home and the team isn't there anymore, it isn't always easy to figure out how they should deal with the lingering effects of war like post traumatic stress syndrome.

The Charles George VAMC and many Asheville community members offer a way for Veterans to work through their problems - white water paddling. The Asheville chapter of Team River Runner (TRR) held their first meeting and instructional session for 2012, Jan. 26 at the Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa.

"What we have here is a first class, top notch, white water paddling course," said Will Leverette, an expert whitewater instructor and a Team River Runner volunteer.

Warren Wilson College

allows Team River Runner to use the college pool one night a week for two hours and also lets the group store their boats on campus. The college encourages its students to volunteer as instructors and earn service credits.

Lee Sanders said volunteers such as Leverette, a member of the CGVAMC mental health staff, Beverly Bradigan, a CGVAMC recreation therapist, and Warren Wilson paddling team members are "amazing."

He said 12 students were in the pool that night, but the class has been as large as 15 - 20 people. The program can, and does, accommodate Veterans in wheelchairs and multiple amputees. "We take whoever comes," said Leverette. TRR is "just what the doctor ordered for these Veterans. They are out of the house socializing, having fun and being active. Five of our students have bought their own boats!" he exclaimed.

The Veterans practice in

Continued on Pg 11



James Coty

Norwegian Minister of Health Visits Hampton

Norwegian Minister of Health Anne Grethe-Strom-Erichsen meets with Hampton VAMC Associate Director of Operations, Benita Stoddard, Jan. 24. During their stop at Hampton, the minister and accompanying key members of her staff, discussed the various types of care Hampton offers Veterans and their outreach efforts for ending homelessness. The visitors also participated in a virtual reality demonstration to learn more about how Hampton VAMC clinicians are treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

VFW Donation Helps Asheville Comfort Dying Veterans

By Dennis Mehring
Asheville VAMC public affairs

People who provide medical care to the sick or injured know that no matter how hard the battle is waged, sometimes, diseases win, infections can't be stopped and some injuries cannot be healed. What happens then?

A group of dedicated professionals at the Charles George VAMC engages in a daily effort to make every day a good day for a dying Veteran and the Veteran's family members. The doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains and volunteers of the Palliative and Hospice Care team focus on caring, not curing. Veterans who are facing a serious, life-limiting illness or injury are helped by the team's approach to providing expert medical care, pain management and emotional and spiritual support that is tailored to a Veteran's needs and wishes at the end of life.

The efforts of these caring professionals were recently recognized, and aided, by a \$4,000 donation from the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 891 in Asheville, the largest VFW post in North Carolina. Post Commander Harold Stines said each year the post holds a fair featuring food and live music and this year they decided to donate the proceeds to the VA.

Dr. Carol Procter, pal-

liative care physician, said she has worked in VA Hospice programs for more than eight years and had never seen a donation that large. "We get lots of \$20 donations, but we never got one that large before," she said.

Jennifer Palumbo, a palliative care social worker, explained how the donation would be used. Appropriated funds cover many of the program's needs, but there are some things government money can't be spent on. She and Dr. Procter have started visiting furniture stores so they can refurbish the Hospice Lounge. "We want the lounge to be a welcoming room for families that includes children and grandchildren," Palumbo said.

Along with furniture, she said they want to buy books and pamphlets that will help educate family members about what their Veteran is experiencing and might answer their questions about difficult issues like artificial feeding and comfort care. The donated money will also be used to buy spiritual books and tracts that reflect the varied backgrounds of the Veterans.

Past donations have been used to buy quilts, tables, window treatments and individual fans for each room. Katie May, palliative care registered nurse, explained that the staff goes to great lengths to create a comforting atmosphere for



Dennis Mehring

Charles George VAMC Valor Hospice Mary Abbott and Victoria Rose show off one of the distinctive quilts used in the hospice. The staff goes to great lengths to arrange rooms to suit each Veteran.

each Veteran. The quilts are not "government issue" and they use fans more often than one would think because the air flow over a terminally ill person helps ease their breathing.

Future plans also call for the purchase of stained glass, bird feeders for every window, a children's library, and things for young children.

The Charles George Hospice is only 15 beds, but it is the largest one in VISN 6, and according to Palumbo it is almost always full. "We have a large retirement community in

the Asheville area, and a large oncology program in the medical center, and those are two of the reasons why the Hospice is almost always full." People are also more aware of Hospice services said Palumbo. "In the last five years we have gone from 200 consults a year to more than 500."

The men and women who work at the Charles George VAMC said they want to thank the members of the VFW Post 891 whose generosity will benefit Veterans and their extended families for years to come.

Asheville Leads Way In Secure Messaging

By Randy McCracken
Asheville VAMC
Communications Specialist
Learning Resources Service

A Veteran patient enrolled at the Charles George VAMC in Asheville sent the first secure message at our facility on Dec. 15, 2010. For the remainder of the month a few more messages trickled in to the earliest champions of this system, Doctors Michael Meador and Walt Martin. More primary care providers joined the system and by April 2011, all of CGVAMC's primary care providers were using Secure Messaging. Shortly after, more

doctors and specialty providers came aboard, making a total of 73 teams now using Secure Messaging.

After one year, our facility has processed more than 17,000 messages and done so in an extremely efficient manner. More than 95 percent of all Secure Messages sent to CGVAMC have been completed within three business days. This efficiency rate remains tops in the VISN and is at or near the top in the nation.

The extraordinary success of Secure Messaging at the CGVAMC is due to the amazing dedication of our staff. Our staff has been exception-



ally skilled at incorporating this system into their normal workflow.

The system does have some flaws and occasionally frustrates people, but the CGVAMC staff has been willing to keep pushing forward and doing their best to work with the tools they have been given.

CGVAMC plans to expand Secure Messaging to all specialty clinics and many non-clinical areas in Fiscal Year 2012.

CGVAMC Securing Messaging Facts

- 17,552 messages sent to date
- 3,011 Veterans opted-in to secure messaging
- 241 staff members using secure messaging
- 73 active secure messaging teams
- 95 percent message completion rate (#1 in VISN)
- 21 percent Veterans with upgraded (in person authentication) account (#7 in the nation)
- 9 percent Veterans opted-in to secure messaging (#1 in the nation)



Sam Smith

VISN 6 going green

Pictured here are solar collectors for the boiler plant water pre-heating system installed at Fayetteville VAMC last November – one of two new solar thermal systems projects that will provide about 40 percent of the hot water supplied to the main facility, reducing the hospital's energy costs and freeing those funds for patient care. Other energy efficiency and sustainable projects within VISN 6 include: a 1.2 MW photovoltaic electric generation system on top of an on-site landfill at Salem, ground source heat pump installation at two buildings at Hampton, thermal upgrades in Durham, Exterior LED lighting at all of the medical centers, new laundries that recycle water, more efficient heating of campus buildings, lighting controls at Hampton & Salisbury, LEED certified polytrauma center at Richmond and a new boiler plant in Asheville. Once completed, these projects should reduce the VISN's utility costs by about \$3.6 million per year, while improving lighting, security and comfort at all of the facilities, said VISN 6 energy manager William M. Hudson. To learn more about VA Green Management Programs, visit www.green.va.gov.

Greenville Clinic continued from Pg 1

Mid-Atlantic region.

This new multi-specialty clinic will provide more than twice the number of Veterans a full range of specialty and ancillary services right here under one roof. Also, along with the size comes more room for diagnostic equipment which means this clinic will eliminate the need to drive to Durham for many, many Veterans," Hoffmann continued.

The new site will allow the VA relationship with Brody School of Medicine at ECU and University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina (formerly Pitt County Memorial Hospital) to flourish.

"With their help, Veterans will have convenient access to high quality specialty care, de-

livered by professionals in their own community," Gigliotti said.

VA's goal for the site, Gigliotti added, is "to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well being. It aims to recruit the best staff, procure state-of-the-art equipment, and promote a Veteran-centric environment. The clinic will welcome all Veterans, from those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, to those from previous conflicts. The Greenville VA Clinic will operate as a satellite facility to the Durham VA Medical Center."

The new clinic is expected to open in late 2013 and provide employment to approximately 300 staff.

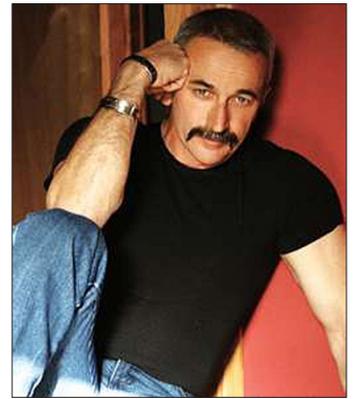
Salem To Host Valentines Concert

Country music artist, Aaron Tippin, will perform a free "Valentines for Veterans" concert at the Salem Civic Center Feb. 9, 2012, at 7 p.m. The concert is being sponsored by the Salem VA Medical Center, Help Hospitalized Veterans Organization and others throughout the community.

The concert is part of the annual weeklong National Salute to Veterans celebration. Salem along with 15 VA medical centers across the country will host "Valentines for Veterans" concerts. "Harry's Law" television star Mark Valley, a graduate of West Point and Gulf War Veteran, is chairman of the 2012 National Salute to Veteran Patients. More than a million cards and letters are sent to VA patients each year during the National Salute.

"This complimentary concert is being held to honor the men and women who have bravely served our Nation, welcome them home to their community and families, and promote volunteerism at VA medical centers and outpatient clinics throughout the country," said Salem VAMC Medical Center Director Dr. Miguel LaPuz.

Aaron Tippin is well known as a country artist who strongly crusades for working men and women. With his 1990 release of "You've Got to Stand for Something," Tippin was invited to appear with Bob Hope on tours to the Mid-



east to entertain troops of Desert Storm. Following his tour, Tippin has been a favorite of America's fighting forces and has traveled back to entertain troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. His other recording credits include, "Where the Stars and Stripes and The Eagle Fly," "I Wouldn't Have It Any Other Way," "My Blue Angel," and many others.

Members of the VA medical center staff will be on hand at the venue to provide information about eligibility, enrollment, VA benefits and other services available to Veterans. Voluntary Service staff will provide volunteer information to members of the community who are interested in volunteering.

Tickets are required for admission and tickets may be obtained at the Salem Civic Center Box Office. Along with Veterans, active military and their families, the concert is also open to the public.

Sleep Disorder Center Now Open

The Richmond VAMC has opened a new Integrated Sleep Disorders Center. The new state-of-the-art laboratory includes 10 individual monitoring units that provide continuous assessment of sleep parameters for outpatients and two monitoring units located in the medical center, utilized to investigate patients with medical conditions requiring an inpatient stay.

The goal of the new unit is

to enhance services for the approximately 5,000 Veterans per year that experience a variety of sleep-related disorders by providing timely appointments, professional evaluations and the highest quality of care and customer service.

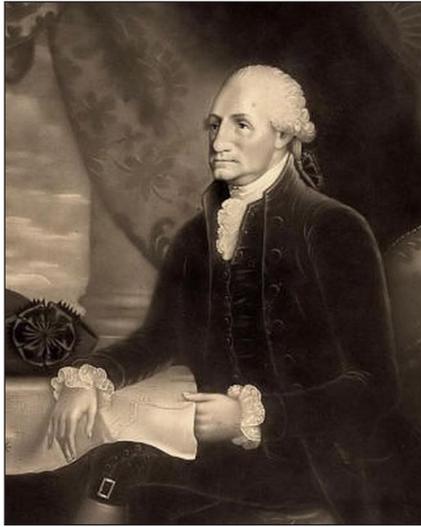
For more information about the program, please contact Sandy Markert 804-675-5000 ext. 3743 or sandy.markert@va.gov.

EXCELLENT SERVICE

Earned by Veterans. Delivered Here.

VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network VISN 6

Presidents' Day 2012



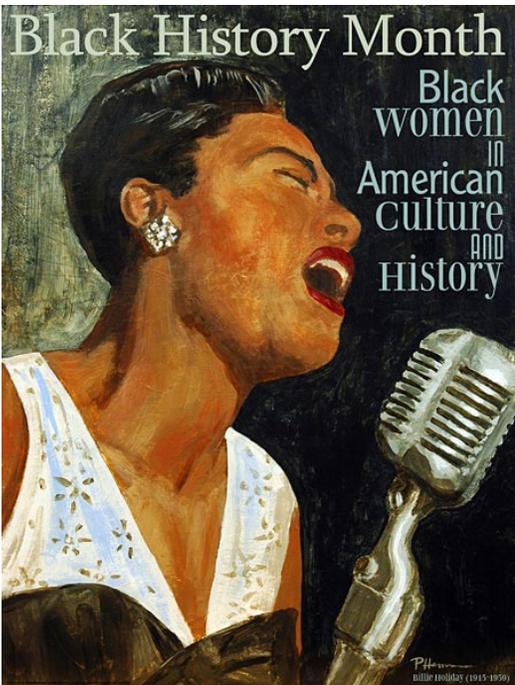
"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

— President George Washington



With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

— President Abraham Lincoln



Black Women in American Culture and History Highlighted During Black History Month

Since 1976, Black History Month is observed annually in the United States and Canada in February. Black or African-American History Month, was begun as Negro History Week by historian Carter G. Woodson in 1926. His goal was to educate the American people of African-American history focusing on African-Americans' cultural backgrounds and reputable achievements. This year's theme is to learn about black women in American culture and history. From the American Revolution to the present, African-American women have played a myriad of critical roles in the making of our nation. Their labor and leadership, their motherhood and patriotism, and their intellect and artistic expression have all enriched both the African-American community and the nation at large. In slavery and freedom, their struggles have been at the heart of the human experience, and their triumphs over racism and sexism are a testimonial to our common human spirit.

USO Celebrates 71st Birthday

"More than 2.5 million men and women wear the uniform of our nation's military, with most serving far from home. The USO serves as a home away from home for them and their families," Sloan D. Gibson, USO President and CEO.

The United Service Organization was formed 71 years ago to provide morale and recreational services to members of the United States military and their families.

Since its creation in 1941, the USO has served as a non-profit organization that receives no direct government funding, but instead relies solely on the generosity of do-

nations and volunteers.

Although not part of the U.S. government, USO is recognized by the Department of Defense, Congress and President of the United States, who serves as Honorary Chairman of the USO. Over time, the USO has evolved, developing new programs and services to meet the ever-changing needs of the troops and their families.

Today, the USO continues to lift the spirits of America's troops and their families, and will continue to be there for them until everyone comes home. The USO's staff and thousands of dedicated volunteers operate more than 150 centers worldwide.

Homecoming For Vietnam Veterans

More than 216,000 North Carolina residents served in Vietnam, and some 1,600 made the ultimate sacrifice in that war. The USO of North Carolina and Charlotte Motor Speedway, with support from the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters, will honor their service with a Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration.

The Vietnam Veterans Homecoming Celebration 2012 is set to be an unforgettable experience featuring live entertainment, displays and

demonstrations, and military salutes.

Representatives from VA medical centers from North and South Carolina will be on hand to provide information and enroll eligible Veterans. Additionally, counselors from area Vet Centers, along with a team from the Winston Salem VBA regional office and a representative from National Cemetery Administration will be on hand. Veterans interested in enrolling should bring a copy of their DD-214.



George C. Duggins, North Carolina Vietnam Veterans of America Region 3 Conference

Date: March 28 to April 1, 2012

Location: Doubletree Biltmore Hotel, 115 Hendersonville Road, Asheville, NC, 828-771-2277

Contact person: Joe Kristek, Pres. NC VVV State Council, 910-673-4562

Room Reservations: Call 828-274-1800. Make sure you tell them you are attending the Region 3 conference to receive the group rate.

Conference and Hotel Registration Information available on NC VVA State Council website: www.vva-nc.org

WELCOME HOME

WHAT
A Welcome Home to
Vietnam Veterans
that many never received

WHEN
9:00AM - 4:30PM Saturday, March 31, 2012

WHERE
Charlotte Motor Speedway





www.CharlotteMotorSpeedway.com/WelcomeHome

Veteran Service Organizations will be on-site to assist veterans. Please bring your DD Form 214 so they can help, if needed.



Celebrate the USO-NC and
Honor America's Armed Forces
March 31, 2012

Marriage Vow Renewal Ceremony

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
USS North Carolina

For couples married while on Active Duty, Reserve,
National Guard status. No fee, but pre-registration required.
\$10 per ticket for others.

☆☆☆☆

Gala Reception and Dance

7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Hannah Block Historic USO Building
Community Arts Center
(120 South 2nd Street)

Reminisce with Big Band music, fine food, champagne toast.
Cash bar. Silent Auction. Art Show. Quilt Raffle.
\$35 per person.

Information, tickets, donations:
uso-nc.org ☆ ilmcelebrates@uso-nc.org ☆ 910.616.3487



Proceeds benefit USO-North Carolina



Newsletter Survey

Your Input Is Needed!

Dear Readers,

With the new year upon us, it's time to take stock of what we have been providing you each month and what we can do to improve.

As important as it is to inform you of the national-level changes and advancements in VA health care, we also strive to bring you a balance of entertaining and informative articles about the people, programs and characters you're liable to encounter in and around VISN 6.

Because you, our readers, comprise a diverse audience with a wide range of interests and needs, it's time you tell us how we are doing. This newsletter is just one of the tools VISN 6 uses to augment the many benefits of VA health care and its success depends upon you. What are we getting right? What do you think needs to be improved upon?

By responding to the questions below, you will be helping us customize this, *your* tool, to better provide the information you need, when you need it. You are also encouraged to add your comments and suggestions to help us better expand the scope of this survey.

Your response can be printed and sent through the U.S. Postal Service, or you can also fax or e-mail it. All of the contact and delivery information is listed below.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. We look forward to continuing to serve you with this, *your* newsletter.

Sincerely, Bruce Sprecher

Voices of VISN 6 Survey

I would like to see:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More national news | <input type="checkbox"/> Less national news |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More local news | <input type="checkbox"/> Less local news |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain the current mix of news | |
| <hr/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More photos | <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer photos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain the current photo and artwork content | |
| <hr/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More feature stories | <input type="checkbox"/> Less feature stories |
| <hr/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publish earlier in the month | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to publish near month's end | |

Comments:

Email input to: Bruce.sprecher@va.gov
Fax input to: Bruce Sprecher at 919-956-7152
Mail input to: Bruce Sprecher, VISN 6, 300 W. Morgan St., Durham, NC 27701

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE



Salem VAMC To Host PTSD Program

Following up on the success of their first PTSD program solely for female Veterans in October 2011, the Salem VAMC's Specialized Inpatient PTSD Unit will conduct two 6.5-week recovery-oriented PTSD programs for female Veterans in 2012. The first session runs April 9 to May 23; the second session runs Oct. 8 to Nov. 20.

A multidisciplinary team consisting of psychologists, a psychiatrist, social workers, nurses, a nurse practitioner and a therapeutic readjustment counselor have been operating a 13-bed inpatient unit providing male Veterans group treatment for PTSD at Salem since 1990. Three male only sessions are scheduled in 2012 as well; the dates for male groups are Feb. 21 to April 4, June 4 to July 8 and Aug. 20 to Oct. 3.

The Salem VAMC PTSD programs are open to male and female Veterans from any conflict that have experienced trauma – combat or military sexual trauma – as a result of their military service and are eligible for VA services. The programs are holistic and address both physical and psychological well-being. All treatment takes place in a closed group setting and consists of community building, education, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and exposure therapy.

Thirteen spaces are available for the upcoming female Veterans sessions. Additionally, each Veteran will have a private room and female clinicians will make up the majority of the program's counselors and nursing staff.

Nine women completed last year's first all-female inpatient PTSD-MST treatment program. "It was an experience with a learning curve for the entire unit's staff," said social worker Kay Montgomery, clinical admissions coordinator for the Specialized Inpatient PTSD Unit. "We felt that it was successful and feedback was very positive."

Dr. Robert Guthrie, coordinator of the Specialized Inpatient PTSD Unit, offered similar words of praise for the program. The psychologist said one of the female Veterans who completed the first inpatient PTSD program wrote, "This program changed my life," and another wrote, "Thank God for this program."

He added that the first session was not free of struggles but by the end of the program all of the Veterans had discovered a deep respect and love for one another.

"They cried about the past; they held one another and talked about how their lives had run on parallel tracks; they gained a new perspective on themselves," Dr. Guthrie said. "They began to stop allowing trauma to get in the way of their having a valued life. One woman said, 'I have chosen to stop suffering.'"

To participate in the program, Veterans must be engaged in outpatient treatment for PTSD and be willing to return to treatment once the program is over.

An on-site evaluation is required for each potential candidate for admission. The evaluation will take approximately 24 hours and will require an overnight stay at the Salem VAMC if the Veteran lives close enough for travel to be feasible.

For additional information and a program application, please contact Kay Montgomery at 540-982-2463, Ext. 2548.

Network Seeks Health Care Providers

The VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network is looking for highly qualified healthcare providers. If you or someone you know is looking for a challenging and rewarding opportunity, please contact Harold "Keith" Liles Jr., Mid-Atlantic Region's National Healthcare Recruitment Consultant, for additional information. Liles can be reached via email at Harold.Liles@va.gov or by phone at (919) 688-7613.

Current Vacancies

Gastroenterology: Salem, Beckley
Emergency Medicine: Beckley, Asheville, Salem, Fayetteville
Psychiatry: Fayetteville, Salisbury
PA or NP Cardiothoracic Surgery: Richmond
Dermatology: Salem, Fayetteville
General Surgery: Fayetteville
Physical Therapy: Beckley
Primary Care: Beckley, Fayetteville
Orthopedics: Salem
Urology: Salem
Hospitalist: Beckley

Fayetteville Job Fair Set For Feb. 10

A job fair for Veteran job seekers will be held in Fayetteville Feb. 10 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Crown Coliseum, 1960 Coliseum Drive. The 2012 "Hiring Our Heroes Job Fair" is a joint venture among the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training (DOL VETS), the North Carolina Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce as well as Fayetteville-Cumberland County and other local Chambers of Commerce.

This event will be open only to employers who are committed to hiring our veterans and to veteran job seekers, active duty military members, Guard and Reserve members, and eligible spouses. Employers and job seekers must pre-register at HoH.GreatJob.net. Registration is free. For help registering, contact hiringourheroes@uschamber.com.

First N.C. AMVETS Career Center Opens

The first AMVETS Career Center in the state of North Carolina opened Dec. 7 on the main campus of Pfeiffer University in Misenheimer. Pfeiffer has two other campuses: one in Charlotte and one in the Triangle.

The center is located in Jane Freeman Hall, 48380 U.S. Highway 52, and is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The center is supported by one of six grants awarded nationwide from AMVETS, an organization whose mission is to support the needs of Veterans of the U.S. armed forces. Typically, AMVETS Career Centers provide career training and employment assistance to Veterans, active duty servicemembers and members of the National Guard and Reserve and offer internet access, writing skill development, networking and online courses, through Mind-Leaders, Inc.

The center is a coalition of Albemarle AMVETS Post 910, Bank of Stanly, Pfeiffer University and the Stanly County Chamber of Commerce to fill resource gaps by complimenting, enhancing and supporting the county's Employment Security Commission, Veterans Services Office and other organizations. For more information about the career center, contact Gerry Pion, Charlie Cosgrove or Joe Cutrone at 704-463-3026 or via e-mail at amvets@fsmail.pfeiffer.edu.

VA Launches Acquisition Internship

WASHINGTON – A special internship to prepare newly-returned Veterans to become federal contracting specialists was launched recently at the Acquisitions Academy of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Frederick, Md.

Called "Warriors to Workforce," the internship is a three-year program. Participants will earn the 24 educational credits in business required to become contracting professionals. The program includes courses in leadership, technical acquisition training and on-the-job experience.

At graduation, participants will have taken the required coursework to achieve a Federal Acquisitions Certification in Contracting, which is recognized throughout the federal sector as evidence of solid education in the career field.

Successful graduates will be eligible for contract specialist positions at the GS-11 level.

In the past two years, the government's contracting force has shrunk, although the volume and complexity of contracts has increased. VA opened its Acquisitions Academy in September 2008 in response to the growing shortage of contracting professionals, for both VA and other federal agencies.

Twenty-three Veterans are enrolled in the inaugural class of the "Warriors to Workforce" internship. Between them, they have seven Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars and over 170 years of military experience.

More information about VA's Acquisitions Academy is available on the Internet at www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov.

Insurance Coverage Increases

WASHINGTON – Some Veterans covered under the Veterans Group Life Insurance program (VGLI) now have the opportunity to increase their coverage to the current maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program.

"Currently, 70 percent of the Veterans covered under VGLI are under age 60, have less than \$400,000 of coverage, and will greatly benefit from this law change," said Allison A. Hickey, Department of Veterans Affairs under secretary for benefits.

Under the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, enacted on Oct. 13, 2010, Veterans can increase their coverage by \$25,000 at each five-year anniversary date of their policy to the current legislated maximum SGLI coverage, presently, \$400,000.

To date, approximately 21 percent of eligible Veterans have taken advantage of this opportunity, resulting in nearly \$113 million of new coverage being issued.

The VGLI program allows newly discharged Veterans to convert their SGLI coverage they had while in the service to a civilian program. Before enactment of this law, Veterans could not have more VGLI than

the amount of SGLI they had at the time of separation from service.

For example, those who got out of the service prior to Sept. 1, 2005, when the maximum SGLI coverage was \$250,000, were limited to \$250,000 in VGLI coverage.

Now on their first five-year anniversary, these Veterans can elect to increase their coverage to \$275,000. On their next five-year anniversary, they can increase the coverage to \$300,000, and so forth.

The additional coverage can be issued regardless of the Veteran's health. To be eligible to purchase this additional coverage, the Veteran must:

- Have active VGLI coverage,
- Have less than the current legislated maximum coverage of \$400,000,
- Request the additional coverage during the 120-day period prior to each five-year anniversary date, and
- Be less than 60 years of age on the five-year anniversary date of his or her coverage.

For more information about VA's Insurance Program or other VA benefits, go to www.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000. Veterans are also encouraged to visit VA's web portal eBenefits - Insurance.

Military's Groundbreaking Vaccine Targets Breast Cancer

By Elaine Sanchez
American Forces Press Service

Military researchers have developed a cutting-edge cancer vaccine that's slashing breast cancer recurrence rates and giving some survivors a better shot at a cancer-free future.

After more than a decade of research and testing, the cancer vaccine, dubbed E-75, soon will move on to its final phase of testing to earn Food and Drug Administration approval, said Army Col. (Dr.) George E. Peoples, director and principal investigator for the Cancer Vaccine Development Program at San Antonio Military Medical Center.

The team has high hopes for this vaccine and its lifesaving potential for breast cancer survivors, particularly since breast cancer is the most prevalent type of cancer seen among military beneficiaries in the hospital here, said Peoples, who also serves here as the deputy director of the U.S. Military Cancer Institute and the medical center's chief of surgical oncology.

"We've made a commitment to take care of active-duty personnel, spouses and retirees," the colonel said. "And cancer is a notable problem among beneficiaries."

The vaccine, Peoples explained, targets a protein commonly over-expressed in breast cancer cells called human epidermal growth factor receptor 2, or HER2/neu.

Cancer vaccines typically target some protein or antigen expressed on cancer cells, he noted. "The idea is to train the immune system to recognize that protein or piece of protein that's highly expressed on cancer cells, but not on normal cells," he said. "That way the immune system can differentiate what's abnormal and normal. If the immune system can recognize it, it marks it for death, basically."

The cancer vaccine concept has been around for a long time, Peoples noted, but the team here has adopted a different approach to test their effectiveness. The vast majority of vaccines in the past were tested on end-stage cancer patients, he explained. However, a vaccine is meant to stimulate the immune system, and a healthy immune system isn't typically seen in someone in the last stages of cancer.

As a result, "a lot of early cancer vaccines tested ... in end-stage patients were found not to be helpful," Peoples said. "No real surprise there."

To more appropriately gauge the vaccine's effectiveness, Peoples' team decided to test it among patients who have a healthy immune system – cancer survivors who are disease-free but at risk for recurrence. Experts can predict recurrence based on several factors including family history, age, size of tumor and the presence of involved lymph nodes, among other indicators.

The researchers targeted the HER2/neu protein, which is expressed at varying levels in women with breast cancer, then honed in on the 60 percent of women who express the protein at low to intermediate levels. The vaccine is a mix of the E-75 peptide of the HER2 protein and an immune system stimulant.

They started with a 200-patient trial in 2001 and followed each woman for five years. Half of the women received the vaccine – one injection a month for six months – and the other half was the control group.

The outcome was very promising, Peoples noted. The recurrence rate among the women in the control group was 20 percent, and 10 percent among the women who received the vaccine. "We

cut recurrence in half," he said.

This success led to the next phase of testing, the colonel said, which will begin early this year and involve 700 to 1,000 patients.

Unlike the earlier phases, however, this step will be undertaken by a commercial company, Galena Biopharma, which has the resources and manpower to undertake such a large-scale test. The company will seek FDA approval and, if received, release the vaccine for public use.

This phase will take about five years to complete – two years to enroll, then a three-year observation period, Peoples said.

"The end point is the recurrence rate after three years," he explained.

Meanwhile, Peoples and his team will turn their attention to a multitude of other projects, many based on the same concept that made the E-75 vaccine so successful – using the body's own immune system to destroy cancer cells.

They've already taken the same vaccine and completed a trial with prostate cancer survivors. As with ovarian and lung cancer, prostate cancer also expresses the HER2 protein.

Peoples said he's also intrigued by a successful trial they conducted on breast cancer survivors who express the HER2 protein at the highest levels, rather than the low to intermediate levels they focused on before. In this study, they combined their vaccine with the drug Herceptin.

They conducted a small trial with 60 women, Peoples said, and when they administered the vaccine and Herceptin together, the recurrence rate dropped to zero. "The preliminary data is very exciting," he said. "But we need to wait and do larger trials."

Word has spread of the cancer vaccine program's successes and intriguing results. Military and civilian experts have approached Peoples wanting to take part in research that has such a potentially widespread impact. The idea of active, specific immunotherapy – engaging the body's immune system to do the work of fighting the cancer – is an exciting and rapidly evolving area, Peoples explained.

Garnering this interest, Peoples has steadily built a worldwide network of military and civilian hospitals that can assist with clinical trials and research. The network includes just about every major military hospital alongside a civilian hospital in cities across the nation and overseas.

The partnership has reached Athens, Greece, and is about to extend into Malaysia. "We're about to circle the globe," he said.

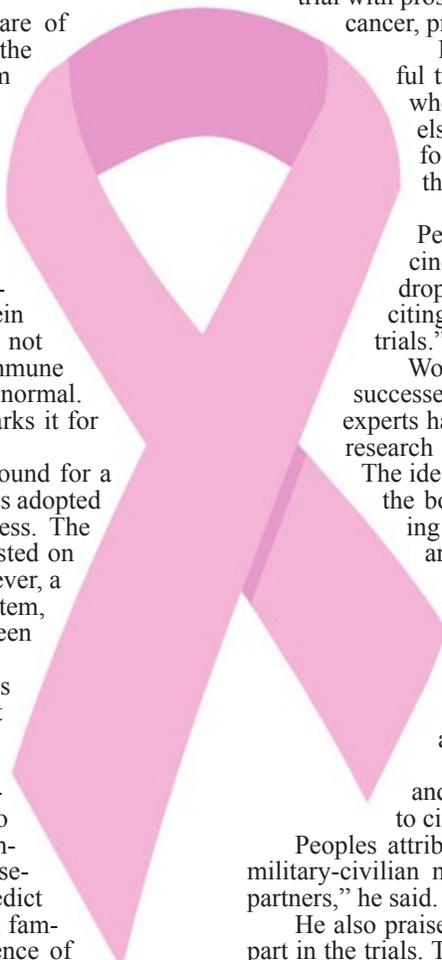
Peoples attributed much of the program's successes to this military-civilian network. "We're very fortunate to have great partners," he said.

He also praised the military men and women willing to take part in the trials. They enter into them knowing they may be part of the control group that doesn't receive a potentially lifesaving vaccine. Despite that fact, he hasn't seen a shortage of willing participants, Peoples said.

The military is an ideal setting for clinical trials," he said. Service members, retirees and family members have a strong sense of service, he noted. "They want to be involved and contribute to the research," he added.

While they're focusing on secondary cancer prevention, the ultimate goal, Peoples noted, is primary prevention, meaning cancer prevention among people with a predicted risk of cancer based on family history and genetic markers."

Hopefully, sometime in my lifetime we'll figure that out," he said.



Sports Camp Helps Wounded

By Erin Tindell

Air Force Personnel, Services and Manpower Public Affairs

When Master Sgt. Christopher Aguilera arrived to breakfast the first day of the Air Force's Joint Adaptive Fitness and Sports Camp held here, his heart dropped.

In the same room were Capt. Tony Simone and his wife Andrea, two people he hadn't seen since last year's one-year anniversary ceremony of a HH-60 Pave Hawk crash in Afghanistan. Simone was the pilot and Aguilera was the gunner and they were attempting to rescue wounded NATO allies. Both were left with wounds and injuries they're still recovering from today. Both were the only two survivors in the crash that killed five other Airmen.

From Jan. 17-21, Simone and Aguilera participated in the inaugural adaptive fitness and sports camp. The inaugural camp hosted at Joint Base San Antonio introduced roughly 35 Air Force, Navy and U.S. Special Operations Command wounded warriors to adaptive fitness, sports and recreational programs implemented throughout the military and within their local communities.

During the five-day camp, wounded warriors participated in adaptive golf and bowling, aquatics, cycling, strength and conditioning, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball. The camp is part of the Air Force's Adaptive Fitness and Sports Program, which provides quality of life programs supporting nearly 1,300 wounded, ill or injured Airmen.

"A lot of the wounded warriors are at a point where their rehabilitation has come to a standstill and this is their new 'normal,'" said Master Sgt. Elisha Abercrombie, camp coordinator and sports specialist with the Air Force Services Agency, which hosted the camp with the U.S. Paralympics. "Their injury is not getting any better or any worse for them, but bringing the warriors to a fitness and sports camp helps get them back into the game of life."

Officials said the goal of the camp was to familiarize the wounded warriors with fitness and sports they can do with their friends and families as well as other opportunities provided by organizations such as the U.S. Paralympics.

"Not only does the camp teach us ways to get to our new normal, our new 100 percent, through adaptive sports, but it helps us connect with others who are going through the same thing," said Aguilera, who suffered numerous injuries including broken bones. "That lets us know we're not the only one with these challenges."

During the crash, Simone suffered a brain injury that put him in a coma for six weeks and made it difficult for him to walk and speak. Simone's wife said the adaptive sports camps give him a sense of camaraderie, accomplishment and greater purpose. Before his injury, Simone said he loved outdoor sports such as cy-

Team River Runner continued from Pg 3

the college pool twice a month until the weather warms up. When the weather improves the paddlers and volunteers move outside to a nearby creek and travel to a river every other weekend. The Asheville TRR chapter only takes a break during December and January.

TRR accomplishes its goals through a step-by-step approach in which paddlers learn to control a kayak in a pool, and then move to open water: rivers, lakes and oceans, where they gain additional experience and skills. TRR organizes trips to more progressively challenging venues in Colorado, Montana, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Mexico

TRR is a non-profit organization, that gives active duty service members and Veterans the chance to find health, healing, and new challenges through whitewater boating and other paddling sports. The benefits of TRR have as much to do with creating a social network and support system as they do with learning water sports skills that provide an exciting adventure lifestyle that suddenly seemed lost due to injury. The program also encourages family members to take part whenever possible.



Dona Fair

Forty-five wounded warriors participated in the inaugural Adaptive Fitness & Sports Camp held Jan. 18 to 21.

cling and archery and was thankful he could still do them through adaptive equipment.

"Being able to participate in adaptive sports means the most to me out of anything I do while recovering," he said.

Abercrombie said the camps help offer a sense of resilience for both the wounded warriors and their families. They can still do fitness and recreational activities, but just in a new way, she said.

"Wounded warriors and families need to know they don't just have to sit at home; they can go out into the real world and still participate in the fitness and recreational activities they enjoyed before," she said. "It's very important for them to understand their life doesn't stop."

Andrea said she appreciates the adaptive sports camps for giving wounded warriors and families an outlet to help them transition to their new lives.

Air Force officials plan to conduct the adaptive fitness and sports camps once a quarter. For more information about the Air Force Services Agency visit www.afsv.af.mil. For more information about the Air Force Wounded Warrior program visit www.woundedwarrior.af.mil.



Dennis Mehring

Tom Snyder (Retired Air Force Staff Sgt) watches closely as Horace McDonald, a US Army Veteran (1979-91), TRR participant and volunteer, helps make adjustments on his kayak. McDonald is also an equipment and facilities management assistant at the Charles George VAMC.

VISN 6 Sites of Care

Albemarle POC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC
252-331-2191

Asheville VAMC
1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911, 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov/

Beckley VAMC
200 Veterans Avenue
Beckley, WV 25801
304-255-2121, 877-902-5142
www.beckley.va.gov/

Beckley Vet Center
1000 Johnstown Road
Beckley, WV 25801
304-252-8220

Brunswick Outreach Clinic
20 Medical Campus Drive
Supply, NC 28462
910-754-8574

Charlotte Vet Center
2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213

Charlottesville CBOC
650 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Danville CBOC
705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Durham VAMC
508 Fulton St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411, 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov/

Emporia CBOC
1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville VAMC
2300 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120, 800-771-6106
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov

Fayetteville Vet Center
4140 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28311
910-488-6252

Franklin CBOC
647 Wayah St.
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredricksburg CBOC
1965 Jefferson Davis Highway
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Greensboro Vet Center
2009 S. Elm-Eugene St.
Greensboro, NC 27406
336-333-5366

Greenbrier County CBOC
804 Industrial Park Rd.
Maxwelton, WV 24957
304-497-3900

Greenville CBOC
800 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27858
252-830-2149

Greenville Vet Center
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Hamlet CBOC
100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hampton VAMC
100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961, 888-869-9060
www.hampton.va.gov/

Hickory CBOC
2440 Century Place, SE
Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex
1824 Hillandale Road
Durham, North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC
241 Freedom Way
Midway Park, NC 28544
910-353-6406, 910-353-6406

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center
110-A Branchwood Driv
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Lynchburg CBOC
1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC
5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Norfolk Vet Center
1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Princeton Vet Center
905 Mercer Street
Princeton, WV 24740
304-425-5653

Raleigh CBOC
3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex
3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Raleigh Vet Center
1649 Old Louisburg Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-856-4616

Richmond VAMC
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000, 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov/

Roanoke Vet Center
350 Albemarle Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Robeson County CBOC
139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-521-8452

Rutherford County CBOC
374 Charlotte Rd.
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-288-2780

Salem VAMC
1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463, 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov/

Salisbury VAMC
1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000, 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov/

Staunton CBOC
102 Business Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC
123 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-2526

Virginia Beach CBOC
244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961, ext. 1900

Virginia Beach Vet Center
324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA, 23452
757-248-3665

Wilmington CBOC
736 Medical Center Drive
Wilmington, NC 28401
910-763-5979

Winston-Salem CBOC
190 Kimel Park Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
336-768-3296

Winston-Salem Annex
2101 Peters Creek Parkway
Winston-Salem, NC 27127
336-761-5300

Wytheville CBOC
165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400