Veterans Day is such a special time for our nation as we honor the men and women who have courageously and selflessly served to protect our freedom. For the 17th consecutive year, our VA hosted the Charleston Veterans Day Parade, and as hundreds of Charlestonians lined the downtown streets you could feel the admiration and respect they have for the brave men and women who have served in the Armed Forces. Led by our grand marshals, World War II Veterans and former POWs Irving Bellow (Army Air Corps, 1943-1945) and John “Jack” Lillich (U.S. Army, 1943-1945), more than 60 Veteran, military and community groups marched proudly across the peninsula.

Mr. Lillich spent several months as a POW and has received his care through VA for more than 70 years. Read his incredible story in this The Post and Courier article posted on Veterans Day.

I started the month visiting with several of our elected officials on Capitol Hill, updating them on our VA. As I met with Senator Graham, Senator Scott, Congressman Sanford, Congressman Carter and staff members from the offices of Senator Perdue and Congressman Rice, I was humbled that in each meeting, the first thing each of them said was they have heard what a fine VA hospital we have here in Charleston. Each of our representatives complimented us on the quality of care and customer service provided here. They were also impressed to learn how we’ve maintaining that quality and access – even while being the second fastest growing VA in the country – and of our strides in such important areas as opioid use reduction and management where we are consistently four to five percent below the national prescribing average. It was also clear our elected officials are hearing the good news about our VA from their constituents — the Veterans we have the pleasure of serving. Thank you for your continued confidence in the health we provide, and for sharing your VA experience with both your fellow Veterans and your elected officials.

The service we strive to provide each day is deeply inspired by the extraordinary sacrifice you have given to us through your service. That’s why over the past two months, after the winds and rains of Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico, seven Charleston VAMC staff answered the call to serve by traveling to Puerto Rico to provide medical care for storm victims and begin the rebuilding process there. I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation to Kim Croy, RN; Sherri Jones, RN; Candace Merritt, LPN; Rose Ramos, RN; Jonathan Rivera-Rosa, MD; and our Carpenter Shop’s Gerry Van Liew and Daymon Drayton. You can read more about two of those employees’ service in this ABC News 4 article, Local VA nurses help thousands of people suffering in Puerto Rico.

Yes, November is certainly a special month for us at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, and December promises to be great too as we celebrate the opening of the Charleston Fisher House on December 7 at 10:00 a.m. Everyone is invited to join us for the celebration ceremony. As we open the doors to this 16 suite facility, we are all reminded of the service and sacrifice of Service members and the families that love them. And while there is no greater expression of love than the laying down of life for others, caring for family members who have suffered the wounds of war is a lifelong commitment that is to be highly valued as well.

To me and to our VA family, every day is an opportunity to honor those who made possible our way of life, our freedoms, and the rights, privileges and responsibilities we enjoy as Americans. I thank you for joining us in honoring them as we all work together to keep our nation’s promise to care for those who have borne the battle.

With gratitude and respect,

Scott R. Isaacks
Director