

Summer 2015

muVA

QUARTERLY

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center

A Place of Their Own

Charleston VA pushes forward to
end Veteran homelessness

Expanded Services

Facility grows clinics in Savannah
and Myrtle Beach, opens joint physical
therapy clinic in Goose Creek



VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



From the Director

Most of us cannot truly imagine being homeless... not knowing where your next meal is coming from, sleeping in a doorway or under a bridge, or the hopelessness that comes with living under these circumstances. Now try to imagine overcoming that situation. How do you find work – or even get cleaned up enough to search for a job? How do you save enough to put down a deposit on a place to live? How do you overcome the underlying issues that led to a situation of homelessness in the first place? The struggle for homeless Veterans is real and persistent. That is why the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is steadfastly committed to helping these individuals in their time of need and, further, to eradicating homelessness among our Veteran population within the next year.

To help in that endeavor, your VA opened a new Community Resource and Referral Center in early June. This center is designed to help Veterans who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless by providing housing first and then the wrap-around services the Veteran needs to succeed. This one-stop service location is the result of our partnership with Palmetto Goodwill and many other community partners to provide everything from case management to housing to job training

and more. You can learn more about the CRRC and the outstanding work being done by our Homeless Program in this issue of myVA Quarterly. You'll also meet two extremely inspiring people: Michael Robinson, a formerly homeless Veteran who is now employed by the VA and has purchased his own home; and Moniquic Eazel, a female Veteran who has successfully rescued herself and her three children from a life of homelessness through the help of the Charleston VA's HUD-VASH program. I have had the distinct pleasure of personally hearing the stories of these two strong individuals. It amazes me the progress they have made and I am honored to know and serve them.

While our goal in addressing Veteran homelessness may not be easy, it is simple ... to help Veterans in our community find their way home. If you know a Veteran at risk or you yourself are struggling with homelessness, I encourage you to reach out to your VA. We are here to help.

Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director



VA | Ralph H. Johnson
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Breaking ground on new Savannah clinic

by Meredith Thomas, Lead Public Affairs Specialist | Photo by James Arrowood

Hundreds of onlookers gathered April 20 – shaded by the branches of expansive, moss-draped live oaks – to witness the ceremonial shoveling of dirt at the future site of the new VA clinic in Savannah, Georgia, located at 1170 Shawnee Street. The event, which was hosted by the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, featured U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson as the keynote speaker and other notable guests, such as Congressman Buddy Carter of the U.S. House of Representatives and Sonny Dixon, news anchor for WTOG 11, who lent his voice and witty personality as master of ceremonies.



VA officials, community leaders and distinguished Veterans shovel dirt to ceremoniously break ground on the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's new Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic

"We have been anticipating the arrival of this VA clinic for years," said District 6 Alderman Tony Thomas, who spoke on behalf of City of Savannah Mayor Edna Jackson. "We are here. It is a reality. It's finally going to happen and we are all so happy for that news."

Once completed, the Savannah Community Based Outpatient Clinic will offer 15 primary care teams in a 55,000 square foot facility, which is double the size of the current clinic. The facility will also offer expanded services to Veteran patients in the areas of mental health, radiology, optometry, podiatry, tele-health, compensation & pension exams, prosthetics, women's health, physical therapy and more.

According to Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Director Scott Isaacks, the Veteran population in Savannah is exploding – with more than 25,000 Veterans residing in Chatham County alone – making the new clinic a much-needed addition to the Charleston VA health care system.

"Last year, in fiscal year 2014, our facility grew at a rate of 7.44 percent," Isaacks said. "The Savannah clinic itself has added more than 1,400 new patients in just the last three years. We are incredibly honored to continue receiving the trust of our patients and humbled to hear the many expressions of appreciation for the high quality of care and devotion of our staff to our patients."

The ceremony sought to keep Veterans at the forefront of the celebration. Isaacks recognized Savannah Veteran of

the Year Frank Mullis, who has assisted thousands of Veterans since 2008 in his role as a DAV claims representative at the Savannah clinic. Additionally, attendees at the ground breaking were invited to view a Veteran art gallery of more than 30 pieces, a sampling of the art therapy works created by patients that will be on display in the new clinic upon its completion.

"We don't owe our Veterans something," said Senator Johnny Isakson. "We owe them everything – and that includes safe, reliable health care. This new clinic that we are breaking ground on here today is a huge step in the right direction as we work together to get these Veterans the services they need and deserve."

The VA is expected to begin occupying the new space in the summer of 2016.

One Hundred Thirteenth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Friday,
the third day of January, two thousand and fourteen

An Act

To improve the access of veterans to medical services from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Definitions.

TITLE I—IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESS TO CARE FROM NON-DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROVIDERS

Sec. 101. Expanded availability of hospital care and medical services for veterans through the use of agreements with non-Department of Veterans Affairs entities.

Sec. 102. Enhancement of collaboration between Department of Veterans Affairs and Indian Health Service.

Sec. 103. Enhancement of collaboration between Department of Veterans Affairs and Native Hawaiian health.

Sec. 104. [REDACTED]

Myrtle Beach outpatient clinic for new, larger consolidated facility **APPROVED**

by Erin Curran, Public Affairs Specialist

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center has been serving the Myrtle Beach area with a local outpatient clinic since 1998. In January of 2005, an expansion project was completed that tripled the size of the clinic to 12,800 square feet. And now, the medical center has been approved for a new consolidated 84,000 square foot clinic to meet the needs of the area's rapidly growing Veteran population.

Since 2005, the number of Veterans that the Myrtle Beach VA Clinic serves has doubled. Today the clinic serves more than 12,000 Veteran patients. The current space can no longer be stretched to accommodate the growing patient load, which means the consolidated clinic project is crucial to the clinic's continued ability to fully serve Veterans in this area.

"We are consistently seeing a rise in the number of patients that we serve," said Dr. Ginia Pierre, lead physician for the Myrtle Beach VA Outpatient Clinic. "An expansion means that we can hire more doctors, nurses and pertinent personnel to serve the growth."

Once built, the new leased space will serve the Veterans of Georgetown, Horry and surrounding counties with expanded services in primary care, mental health, tele-mental health, radiology, audiology, optometry, podiatry, additional outpatient medical and surgical specialty care, compensation and pension, physical therapy, and women's health.

This major lease project was funded as a part of the Veterans Access,

Choice and Accountability Act. The act was passed into law in 2014 and provides \$16.4 billion for the newly-established Veterans Choice Fund. The Choice Act authorized 27 major medical facility leases in 18 states and Puerto Rico. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center was the recipient of two of those major medical facility leases: a new clinical annex in North Charleston and the new expanded space in Myrtle Beach.

The Medical Center is in the beginning stages of identifying a potential site for the new outpatient clinic. The award to the developer is expected to happen in fiscal year 2017 and the projected activation date is estimated to occur in late fiscal year 2020 or early fiscal year 2021.

VA, DOD open new Joint Physical Therapy Clinic

by Erin Curran, Public Affairs Specialist

Following the ceremonial ribbon cutting by VA Physical Therapist Lori Marrow, DOD Physical Therapist Lt. Lauren Borwn, Naval Health Clinic Charleston Commanding Officer Capt. Marvin Jones and Charleston VAMC Director Scott Isaacks to officially open the Joint VA-DOD Physical Therapy Clinic in Goose Creek, staff and visitors toured the new clinic spaces.

Active duty military personnel and Veterans stood side-by-side May 20 to celebrate the grand opening of the new VA-DOD Joint Physical Therapy Clinic located at Naval Health Clinic Charleston in Goose Creek. NHCC's Director for Administration Cmdr. Amy Smith served as the mistress of ceremonies. The event featured addresses from NHCC Commanding Officer Navy Capt. Marvin Jones and Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Director Scott Isaacks.

"[This clinic] is a testament to how Naval Health Clinic Charleston and the VA medical center continue to work hand-in-hand to provide the highest level of care for all our patients, just as we have for years," said Capt. Jones. "It's that level of commitment to expanding care for all beneficiaries that have paved the way for today's clinic opening."

The Physical Therapy Clinic is a result of federal health care entities banding together more than 9 years ago to form the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance. The group combines resources, energy and ideas to enhance the quality of care and scope of health care services for all VA and DOD patients.

In 2011, the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance was designated as a VA-DOD Joint Venture site, receiving recognition by both the Department of Veterans Affairs

and the Department of Defense for collaboration efforts to improve the medical services for their patients. The blended crowd of active duty members, Veterans, VA employees and civilians at the event reflected the collaboration between VA and DOD in providing continuity of care for patients as they transition from active duty to Veteran status.

Funding of the clinic through the Joint Incentive Fund has enabled VA to staff the clinic with two physical therapists, two physical therapy assistants and a medical services support assistant. VA prosthetics will also be available in the joint clinic where two prosthetic program support assistants will order, stock and issue prosthetic devices to VA patients on-site. Access to care for VA and DOD beneficiaries is expected to improve with appointments provided in a convenient location that offers abundant parking for patients and their caregivers.

"In many instances, the service member who retires and stays in the local area can continue to receive the same quality medical care from the same practitioners at the same facility that he or she has grown accustomed to," said Isaacks. "We are thrilled to see this long anticipated clinic come to fruition in a community filled with thousands of Veterans and service members—many of whom will benefit from the outstanding quality of medical care here."



Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center
- and -
Naval Health Clinic
Charleston
Welcome You to the
Physical Therapy
Clinic

Charleston VA opens CRRC for homeless Veterans

by Meredith Thomas, Lead Public Affairs Specialist

Department of Veterans Affairs officials, community leaders and a group of formerly homeless Veterans joined together June 5 to cut the ribbon and ceremoniously open the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's newest endeavor – the Community Resource and Referral Center. The mission of the center is to provide one-stop service, in collaboration with local community and government partners, to serve both homeless Veterans and Veterans at risk for homelessness and their families.

VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson was on hand to provide keynote remarks. He was joined in celebration by U.S. Senator Tim Scott, Palmetto Goodwill Chief Executive Officer Robert Smith, North Charleston City Councilman Ed Astle, VA Southeast Network Interim Director Thomas Smith and Charleston VAMC Director Scott Isaacks, as well as more than 100 VA staff members, community partners and Veterans.

"On any given night, 50,000 men and women who were willing to put their lives on the line in defense of freedom are homeless," said Scott. "As a community, we are ready to put a stake in the ground and say, 'Not here. Not now. Not on our watch.' This new center is how we will honor our promise to our Veterans. This is a place where they can come and find help in a time of desperate need."

The new CRRC provides more than 4,000 square feet of space to aid homeless Veterans and includes 12 workstations, seven private offices, an exam room, two group meeting rooms, and men and women locker rooms equipped with showers.

"Our Homeless Program deploys two important approaches that help Veterans get the care they deserve," Isaacks said. "First, our 'No Wrong Door' policy implements a process where anyone can refer Veterans to the program, including VA staff, outside agencies and Veteran self-referrals. Second, the 'Housing First' model enables us to find housing for the Veteran first, and then provide the wrap-around services they need to have long-term success – services such as medical treatment, mental health appointments, substance abuse treatment clinics and housing case management."

VA services provided on site at the CRRC will include Health Care for Homeless Veterans walk-in clinic, eligibility and enrollment, outreach and intake service, short and long-term housing case management, assessment for VA Grant Per Diem for transitional housing, assessment for HUD VA Supported Housing for permanent supported housing, telehealth services to VA outpatient clinics, educational groups, and more.

VA staff will be joined in the center by several community entities, including Palmetto Goodwill, One 80 Place Supportive Services for Veterans Families, Family Services, Inc., South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, Charleston County School District Office of Adult Education, Social Security Administration, Lowcountry Homeless Coalition and Veterans Benefits Administration.



VA and Palmetto Goodwill officials, community leaders and a group of formerly homeless Veterans celebrate the grand opening of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Community Resource and Referral Center located in North Charleston. The center's goal is to be a one-stop shop for homeless Veterans needing assistance from VA and community resources. | Photo by James Arrowood

"In our mission to end Veteran homeless by the end of 2016, we have created facilities like this Community Resource and Referral Center that are true examples of best-in-class government and of collaborative efforts across government agencies and up and down the line at the community level," said Gibson. "This is an outstanding example of how we are transforming our agency by fostering a culture of continuous improvement. VA has already committed more than \$1 billion toward eradicating homelessness in our Veteran population. **Working together, we can and will end Veteran homelessness - it's the right thing to do.**"

The new Community Resource and Referral Center is located at 2424 City Hall Lane in North Charleston and is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Disabled American Veterans vans provide transportation to and from Charleston VAMC twice daily. The vans leave the medical center at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. The CRRC is also conveniently accessible via community bus line.

VA  **Community Resource & Referral Center**

STAND DOWN AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

Stand Down provides medical screenings, job training, housing assistance and other services to homeless individuals and other people in need.

Each year the local Stand Down events provide breakfast and lunch for more than 2,000 people. More than 200 volunteers from across the community are on site to assist the homeless population. Along with the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Palmetto Goodwill, there are multiple participants involved from Veteran Service Organizations, the State Department, Department of Defense Commands, the Knights of Columbus, Elks Club and other community organizations helping by donating time, funds, hygiene items, clothing, reading glasses or services, such as haircuts.

Charleston

Friday, October 2, 2015
10:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Armory Park, 5000
Lackawanna Boulevard,
North Charleston, SC 29405

Savannah

Tuesday, September 15, 2015
8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
301 W. Oglethorpe Avenue,
Savannah, GA 31401

Myrtle Beach

Friday, September 18, 2015
8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
3391 Phillis Boulevard,
Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

Learn More by visiting www.charleston.va.gov/standdown

Charleston VA helps Veterans escape the cycle of homelessness

by Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

As a social worker at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, Yvonne Tucker has seen many Veteran patients come through her office door who are struggling with addiction and homelessness, disheartened and on their own.

“I believe you must have a natural compassion for people to do what we do,” said Tucker. “It’s not an easy thing to see, someone who is at the end of their rope with no hope.”

Tucker is one of many social workers at the Charleston VA Medical Center working in the Department of Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing program to provide Veterans a chance to live a healthy life on their own.

The HUD-VASH program is a joint effort between HUD and VA to move Veterans and their families out of homelessness and into permanent, stable living situations. HUD provides housing assistance through its Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) allowing homeless Veterans to rent privately owned housing.

At the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in fiscal year 2014 there were 422 Veterans permanently housed through HUD-VASH. This year, the facility has 612 vouchers to help Veterans obtain secure homes. Additionally, the medical center offers transitional housing in the form of 105 grant per diem beds, seven of which are allocated for female Veterans with or without families, and 30 contract beds that enable quick placement for intact Veteran families.

The Charleston VA Medical Center’s Homeless Program seeks to provide housing first and then offer the wrap-around services Veterans need to live happy and productive lives. These services include specialized health care for homeless Veterans, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, housing case management and more. The Charleston VA and its outpatient clinics also offer services that assist homeless Veterans in their return to work, including Compensated Work Therapy and Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program.

With safe housing programs, health care and mental health services and employment assistance, the Charleston VA strives to ensure every homeless Veteran is taken care of and set back on the right path.

As the Veteran’s case manager, Tucker will visit them right in their home. This provides important continuity of care and an opportunity to assist Veterans in their recovery and prevent future episodes of homelessness.

“The challenge is not only assisting the Veteran to obtain housing but assisting them to maintain housing in order to break that cycle of homelessness they are accustomed to,” said Tucker. “There is truly not a more rewarding experience than to witness a Veteran patient sign a lease and receive the keys to their own

Yvonne Tucker, VA Social Worker
Photo by James Arrowood



Michael Robinson, a formerly homeless Veteran, stands proudly outside the home he recently purchased. | Photos by James Arrowood



Army Veteran transitions from homeless to homeowner

by Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

For 20 years Army Veteran Michael Robinson was encouraged to seek help, to beat the drug and alcohol addictions that had him in a cycle of homelessness and incarceration. It wasn't until his 50th birthday approached and Robinson sat in the back of a police squad car that he finally decided to change.

After several months in jail, Robinson was released on his own accord and returned to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Substance Abuse Treatment Clinic, a structured outpatient program.

"When I turned 50 I realized I had let everyone down including myself," said Robinson. "There had to be a better way to live. This time, help was what I wanted," said Robinson. "You can't get clean and sober unless you really want it yourself, deep down."

After seeking help from the VA for his addictions, Robinson cleaned himself up and now owns a home of his own.

He is a role model for many who are looking for the right path.

Robinson's new life path is one that includes helping other Veterans who face homelessness and addictions. He is a peer support specialist at the Charleston VA Medical Center, trained to help other Veterans facing the same cycle he finally escaped.

Robinson advocates for Veterans in treatment who have housing and other needs, or who just need to talk. He can relate to their struggles in a way others cannot.

"My story is like every other recovering alcoholic and addict," he says. "When I talk with the Veterans who come into the Homeless Program, I can share my experience with them and show them that their lives can definitely change and that I am willing to assist them in any way that I can in hopes that they will become productive members of society."

Army Veteran Michael Robinson reflects on his time as a homeless individual. Robinson regularly slept on benches in Charleston's Waterfront Park prior to finding help with the Charleston VAMC's Homeless Program.



Moniquic Eazel, a formerly homeless Army Reserve Veteran, and her children enjoy time together in the park outside their apartment. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Homeless Program provided Eazel with much needed assistance and access to stable housing in a time of turmoil. Photos by James Arrowood

Female Veteran, children find their way home

by Erin Curran, Public Affairs Specialist

Every Veteran should have a home—a safe and stable place they can call their own. For some Veterans, combat experiences have significantly altered their ability to cope with day-to-day life. Disabilities, addiction, and mental illness can be difficult challenges Veterans face that force them to choose between shelter and other basic needs. America's heroes served our country, and the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is committed to honoring their service with strong efforts to combat homelessness.

Moniquic Eazel is one of those deserving Veterans who found support through the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Homeless Program. While living in Columbia, South Carolina, Eazel found herself in a difficult situation—in an abusive relationship with three young children and in need of help. Eager to change her life, she reached out to the Homeless Program and has now been successfully engaged in the HUD-VASH housing program for four years.

"Since the beginning, the VA has understood my story, taken me under

their wing and helped me get to where I am today," she said. "They have given my family a safe and stable home where we can build our future."

The Medical Center's Homeless Program offers Veterans the support services they need to find permanent housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program combines Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The "Housing First" model deployed by the medical center enables the facility to do just that—find housing for the Veteran first, and then provide the additional services they need to have long term success—services such as medical treatment, mental health appointments, substance abuse treatment, and housing case management. In fiscal year 2014 the Homeless Program housed 422 Veterans through HUD-VASH, giving each of these Veterans a permanent place to call home.





Improving mobility for Veterans with Parkinson's

by Erin Curran, Public Affairs Specialist | Photos by James Arrowood

Charleston VA Physical Therapists Heather Mote and Vicki Cheng demonstrate the LSVT BIG movements that they teach Veterans during a 16 session treatment intended to help them manage the effects of Parkinson's disease.



Helping Veterans improve mobility is the goal of physical therapists and the Lee Silverman Voice Treatment is doing just that for Parkinson's patients at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. Parkinson's disease causes changes in the brain that lead to body movements

getting smaller, which over time, restricts body mobility. LSVT BIG is a physical therapy protocol that was developed specifically for Parkinson's patients to increase the amplitude of limb and body movement. The treatments help patients' speed and balance with an overall goal of enhancing their quality of life.

"The longer a patient is on medication for Parkinson's the less effective the medication will become," says Heather Mote, VA physical therapist. "LSVT BIG is a treatment that will continue to help the patient throughout the duration of their life."

Two Charleston VA physical therapists, Heather Mote and Vicki Cheng, have been certified to administer the LSVT treatment. After hearing from colleagues in the community about the remarkable improvements they saw in patients post treatment, they wanted to bring the

treatment to the Charleston VA—and they have done just that. Mote and Cheng independently sought out the certification, attended the two day course in Jacksonville, Florida, and now lead Veterans through the program.

LSVT BIG is a 16 session program where the patient participates in one hour of treatment, four days a week for four weeks. Additionally, the patient is asked to complete daily in-home sessions. While the treatment is very intense it is proven to be effective.

"We had a patient that needed a cane and chair to steady his movement during therapy," said Cheng. "After completion of the program, the patient had improved so much he was able to get rid of his cane. Our goal is to reduce or get rid of assistive walking devices for our patients."

Parkinson's patients have to put in about 75 percent more effort to make the same size movements as those without the disease. The big movements repetitiously practiced through the LSVT BIG treatment help retrain the brain on the amount of effort needed to improve motor skills.

"All of our patients have said that this treatment program has changed their lives," says Mote. "I tell them that this program is just like a medication in the sense that you have to incorporate it into your daily life, practice every day, to achieve the results."

Veterans and VA employees share a laugh during Charleston VAMC's VA2K Walk and Roll. This nationwide event sought to get participants moving and had the added benefit of helping homeless Veterans through donations of essential items such as food, clothing and toiletries.



by Meredith Thomas, Lead Public Affairs Specialist



Nationally, the VA2K Walk and Roll attracted nearly **23,750 participants** at 209 VA facilities. Across the country, these events gathered **\$325,650 worth of donations** intended for homeless Veterans, which was a record setting amount.

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center joined VAs nationwide to participate in the 5th Annual VA2K Walk and Roll event May 20. Veteran patients, employees and visitors had a chance to get out and enjoy a short two-kilometer walk in the spring sunshine while also contributing donated items for homeless Veterans in need.

"The VA2K is a great way for participants to take their fitness to the next level and build a support group in addition to helping support homeless Veterans," said Malissa Robinson, Charleston VAMC's Health Promotion Disease Prevention program manager. "I think these types of events build camaraderie among people. I enjoyed seeing people peer up or walk in groups to accomplish the 2K. Support is important for those who struggle with being consistent with an exercise regimen."

The event was coordinated by the facility's employee wellness committee and was held in conjunction with a health and wellness expo, which offered employees and Veterans access to resources that promote a healthy lifestyle. More than 150 Veterans and staff members took part in the walk and health fair.

Charleston's walk participants strolled along the two-kilometer route at the back of the facility and were treated to live music by Veterans in Harmony, a local all Veteran band. The wellness committee created a carnival-like atmosphere by setting up various games like corn hole, ladder toss and hula hoop so participants could be physically active in a variety of different ways.

Cheryl Huff, health behavior coordinator and clinical psychologist at the Charleston VAMC, said that the event helped foster an environment of healthy living and showed Veterans that the facility is committed to ensuring everyone stays on the path to wellness.

"The friendly spirit of encouragement to be physically active provides a positive influence in our daily work-lives and personal attitudes," she said. "Our Veterans then see their providers 'practicing what they preach' when it comes to a healthy lifestyle. Several Veterans shared with me that seeing providers participate in the event increased their confidence in their treatment team and made them feel that their providers are more approachable."

Additionally, attendees were able to do their part for the community by providing donations such as clothing, toiletries, food and water that would directly benefit homeless Veterans in the area.

"Being physically active is a lifestyle change that has so many benefits for the body and helping the homeless benefits our soul," said Robinson.



Veteran Marta O'Conner demonstrates her hula-hooping skills at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's VA2K Walk and Roll event.

Charleston VA holds Memorial Day remembrance ceremony

by Meredith Thomas, Lead Public Affairs Specialist

Dozens of onlookers paused in remembrance of America's fallen service members May 22 during a Memorial Day ceremony in the front flag courtyard of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. The event took place in the beautiful Charleston sunshine and was punctuated by cheerful, gospel music performed by the Lowcountry Voices choir.

"This Memorial Day, we have so many reasons to honor, remember and respect those who sacrificed to protect our way of life," said Charleston VA Medical Center Director Scott Isaacks. "This is a day to thank every American generation who served, to salute them for the enduring gifts they gave to us who gather here today."

The ceremony also featured an invocation and moment of silence by VA Chaplain Allan Owen, the Pledge of Allegiance led by U.S. Army Veteran Karl Naugle and keynote remarks from Navy Capt. Marvin Jones, commanding officer of Naval Health Clinic Charleston in Goose Creek.

"The numbers of our fallen heroes are not just statistics. They are real people, with real families, who lived in real communities, like ours," said Jones. "We're grateful that the VA, and particularly the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, has always shown great pride in honoring those lost and has displayed unwavering support for those that America sends into harm's way by providing them top quality care when they return from duty. Today is another opportunity for us to give thanks."

According to the Department of Defense, the United States has called upon more than 42 million Americans to serve their country in a time of war. Of those service members, more than one million have lost their lives fighting for the freedoms of all citizens.



Naval Health Clinic Charleston Commanding Officer Capt. Marvin Jones gives the keynote address at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Memorial Day ceremony.



The Lowcountry Voices choir provides upbeat musical entertainment prior to the ceremony.

A Marine Corps Veteran bows his head during a moment of silence in remembrance of those service members who lost their lives while serving in our nation's military.

For the second year, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center teamed up with local radio station 103.5 WEZL to host a special military appreciation seating area at the station's Party in the Park summer concert series. Each Tuesday night in June, listeners came out in droves, toting beach chairs and blankets, to enjoy live music from up-and-coming country music artists at Memorial Waterfront Park in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.

The Charleston VAMC provided a special roped-off area close to the stage at each event where Veterans, military members and their guests could enjoy covered seating at provided tables and chairs or sit on the grassy area designated specifically for the honored guests. Attendees were simply asked to show proof of military service at the VA entrance tent in order to gain access to the area.

Charleston VA hosts Veterans & service members:

by Meredith Thomas, Lead Public Affairs Specialist



Local Charleston band, Sittin' in a Tree, performs at WEZL's Party in the Park



Concert goers enjoy the music during a free performance at the first week of the concert series. Charleston VAMC partnered with WEZL to offer a special military appreciation area at each of the five weekly events.

PARTY IN THE PARK

"The VA seating area builds a sense of community among the audience," said Alene Grevey, regional market president for iHeartMedia Charleston, the media group responsible for Party in the Park. "It provides an opportunity for our military personnel to be recognized for their heroic efforts by anyone who passes by and also gives our hometown heroes a great view of a great show."

Headliners at the five events included Dan + Shay, Kelsea Ballerini, John King, Canaan Smith, Mo Pitney, Chase Bryant, Craig Wayne Boyd, Kristian Bush and Mickey Guyton. The lineups were also supplemented each week with performances by local area musicians.

"We are so proud to sponsor this military appreciation area at the Party in the Park events," said Tonya Lobbstaal, public affairs officer for the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. "At the Charleston VA, we strive to honor the service of each of our Veterans in every interaction we have with them. This is just

one more way that we can say 'thank you' for the sacrifices our military members have made in defense of our country."

VA staff and volunteers were on hand to answer eligibility and benefits questions and to hand out summer fun promotional items like beach balls, sunscreen care kits and insulated cups.

According to WEZL, the concerts draw 4,000 to 6,000 participants each night and the military appreciation tent is a popular feature among active duty service members who are still serving and Veterans who have long ago hung up their uniforms.

"The event was so successful last year that we just had to do it again," said Lobbstaal. "It's great to see the younger military members and their families interacting with the Veterans while they enjoy some good country music. And, of course, we all have a fantastic time too! You'll definitely see us out here at future events."



Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center
109 Bee Street
Charleston, SC 29401

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Important VA Phone Numbers

Charleston VA Medical Center

843-577-5011 or toll-free 1-888-878-6884 or
TTY: 843-789-6888

Telephone Advice Line

843-789-6400 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need medical advice from their
primary care provider or have questions about their
medications can call the TAP line Monday through
Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Scheduling an Appointment

843-789-6500 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule
an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including
Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort, Trident, and
Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Automated Prescription Refill Line

843-577-5011 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription
or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day,
7 days a week. Have your social security number and
prescription numbers ready when calling.

VA Benefits (other than health care)

1-800-827-1000
Veterans who need information on VA
benefits including VA pension and
compensation, home loans, and education
can call the VA Regional Office.

Billing Questions

1-866-258-2772
Veterans who have questions about a
bill received from the Charleston VA
Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-TALK (8255), Press 1 for Veterans
Veterans can call the Veterans Crisis Line to talk to
trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a
week or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net

My HealthVet

www.myhealth.va.gov
Veterans can manage their health by logging onto
My HealthVet, which offers access to Veteran health
benefits and services.



For more information on VA related topics, visit www.charleston.va.gov. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

