



inspire!

Office of Patient Centered Care
and Cultural Transformation



inside....
Veterans with Guitars
Poolside Patriots
Victory Belles
and much more...

GULF COAST VETERANS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
Summer 2016 | QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | Volume 2 | Issue 16

The **Inspire!** newsletter is published on the GCVHCS home page. You can contribute your inspirational story to **Inspire!** Tell us about a *day in your life* and why you are passionate about your work at GCVHCS. Contact the editorial staff for guidelines. To submit your *inspiring patient story*, click on the Tell Your Story icon.



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To provide a forum for employees and volunteers to communicate ongoing progress with patient centered care and cultural transformation (PCC/CT) within the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (GCVHCS); to foster a climate that reflects the health care system's creativity and diversity. You can find out more about the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation on the SharePoint site. We are playing a part in transforming VA's culture!



(left to right) Shantela McCray, Bridgett Levine, Hayley Werth, Robert Raney, Marsheta Howell

Pensacola Canteen staff receives high rating after inspection

By ROBERT RANEY
Canteen Manager, JACC

Our staff in the Joint Ambulatory Care Center's Canteen in Pensacola was recently inspected by Eco-Sure, a division of Eco-Lab, a large food-service chemical and ware-sanitizing company. I'm happy to report to all of our customers that we achieved a 92 percent rating – an excellent score!

Receiving this score was due in large part to the efforts of our staff. They have admirably performed their regular cleaning duties along with their regular jobs. They also come in for a half-day on Saturdays each quarter to do deep cleaning.

These cheerful, talented, and capable folks are Shantela McCray and Marsheta Howell, grill cooks; Kerry Burke, who stocks the Cold Simply To Go cooler; Hayley Werth, supervisory operations clerk, who also handles Breakfast Hot Simply To Go; and Bridgett Levine, retail sales clerk who also covers Lunch Hot Simply To Go.

They keep fresh, enjoyable food available and our retail store stocked, while handling frequent patron requests with grace and professionalism. They do all this while keeping the area neat and clean. This daily performance has earned them high marks in my book.



Guitar program helps veterans heal, bond

PENSACOLA, Fla. – The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System has a partnership with the local Guitars 4 Veterans chapter to provide therapeutic music and guitar lessons to Veterans. Currently, this program takes place at the Joint Ambulatory Care Center in Pensacola, Florida.

Many thanks to Douglas Morgan, the volunteer instructor for the last five years who has helped approximately 30 veterans successfully complete the program. At the end of the program, veterans are presented with a new guitar, provided by the G4V organization.

The Pensacola News Journal and USA Today published a feature article on the program. Veterans said the fellowship and spending time with others who have had similar life experiences is a huge benefit of the program.



on the cover...

Guitars 4 Veterans provides monthly therapeutic music and guitar lessons for Pensacola Veterans



VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM

The purpose of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program (VJO) initiative is to avoid unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration of Veterans, by ensuring eligible Veterans in contact with the criminal justice system have access to Veterans Health Administration mental health and substance abuse services.

VJO PROGRAM FUNCTIONS:

- Assist with Veteran enrollment in the local VA system
- Assist in referrals and linkage of eligible Veterans to the services available through their local VA facility, in lieu of incarceration or upon release from incarceration
- Serve as team member of operational Veterans courts
- Assist with development of Veterans courts, or work with existing treatment courts to coordinate referral to VA treatment programs
- Provide education to law enforcement and court personnel on military related issues, such as military culture, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, etc.

VJO MAY NOT:

- Complete forensic evaluations for the court
- Guarantee acceptance into VA treatment programs (treatment program staff evaluates potential participants prior to admission)
- Accept custody of Veterans in confinement

VJO ELIGIBILITY:

- Veterans, in contact with local law enforcement, who can be appropriately diverted from arrest to mental health treatment
- Veterans in a local jail, either pretrial or serving a sentence
- Veterans involved in adjudication or monitoring by a court

For more information, contact:

Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist | (228) 243-7498



Congratulations to an award-winning provider

PENSACOLA, Fla. – Nancy D’Silva, MD, FAAD, a dermatologist at the Joint Ambulatory Care Center in Pensacola, Fla., was awarded the 2016 Samuel W. Sauer Occupational and Environmental Medicine Excellence in Instruction award from the United States Army School of Aviation Medicine in July.

Dr. D’Silva, a former U.S. Air Force flight surgeon who has worked for VA since February 2006, had this to say about her award:

I am humbled and honored by the award. I love teaching these occupational medicine residents. I understand what these physicians should know in dermatology whether they are on land, air, or sea, to help our troops.



Stay Informed

Stay connected to GCVHCS.

If severe weather or another contingency negatively impacts our health care facilities, look for update on Facebook and Twitter (keyword search: @VAbiloxi) and at www.biloxi.va.gov/emergency/index.asp

Warrior to Soul Mate workshop facilitated by unique couple

By MARY KAY GOMINGER
Community and Public Affairs Service

VA Gulf Coast Chaplain Jo Kirkendall first met Chaplain Jim Kirkendall nearly 30 years ago. They were both Navy chaplains, stationed in California. When they met, they found they had similar backgrounds — they both were missionary kids. Jo lived in Tanzania and Nigeria (Africa) for 10 years with her physician mother and preacher father. Jim's family did work in Beirut, Lebanon (Asia) so, as a child and teenager, he lived there for seven years. Now these former missionary kids had grown up to be Military Chaplains.

Fast forward 16+ years and their paths cross again. They reconnected and two years later they were married.

These days they each have their separate ministries. Chaplain Jo Kirkendall is a chaplain at the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System. Chaplain Jim Kirkendall retired with 26 years in both the Army and Navy and now works with their denomination, The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, in disaster relief work. And together, these two chaplains facilitate the Warrior to Soulmate workshops offered across the health care system to Veterans and their spouses/significant others.

"We've had the opportunity to facilitate these workshops for four years," Chaplain Jo Kirkendall said. "For us to do this as a couple has such an impact. The couples

taking the workshop can see that we don't just teach these concepts, we live them. And that is very powerful."

Chaplain Jim Kirkendall agreed. "We've had probably 100 couples take this workshop since we started," Jim said. "For some couples, we can see results by the end of the two-day workshop. We've had couples come in that are distant to each other and barely talking. By the end of the second day, they are sitting close and holding hands. It is very gratifying to see the impact this workshop has on relationships."

Chaplain Jo Kirkendall said she and Jim are the only two chaplains married to each other, teaching this course in VISN 16. She and Jim are both proud and humbled by the experience.

"We don't just teach this course," Jo said, "we live it. The skills we have learned in the workshop have made our own marriage stronger and the couples who attend can see that. Couples don't have to wait until they are in crisis to participate. The Warrior to Soul Mate workshop will enhance any relationship."

Here are some comments from the workshop:

What did you like most...

- "It offers the most common sense yet simple tools to encourage safe communication."



- "A course offered that really works with real tools for life!"
- "Offered the chance to do practical exercises which made the information much easier to understand."
- "Brings our communications as a family and married couple much closer and better."
- "I liked that it opened my husband up and in only two days our relationship has gotten better. This will really help our communication and patience skills."
- "Helped me find my emotions."
- "I found that each lesson effectively built onto the next. Practice exercises with coaches was valuable. By taking the course with my spouse, it gave us a level learning platform."

How do you think the information and skills will be useful in your life?

- "We learned how to speak calmly instead of arguing."
- "They will give me the tools to help me not make the same mistakes I made in my previous marriages."
- "It will help us regain the strength in our relationship."
- "Bring a happier, closer, more understanding way of belief to our marriage."

POOLSIDE HEROES

By JERRON BARNETT

Community and Public Affairs Service

PENSACOLA, Fla. – What began as a family fun day for two Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System employees and their families, ended up putting both of them in a crisis situation to save a young child's life at Pensacola Beach on Aug. 28.

Joint Ambulatory Care Center Registered Nurse Craig Effinger was enjoying a day with his family in the Holiday Inn Resort Hotel on Pensacola Beach, floating along the hotel's "Lazy River" with his 15-month old son in his lap. Life was good, a fun day in the sun.

The atmosphere at the hotel that day was like any other on the beaches of northwest Florida. The air was filled with the joyous sounds of children's play, laughter and music. In an area of the pool nearby, adults dressed as pirates played games with children.

The Effingers' day on the beach was coming to an end. His wife Maree, a local pharmacist, who had been packing up their things, beckoned to her husband that it was time to go home. The series of events that followed may have changed Effinger's perspective on life forever.

As Effinger made his way toward where his wife was sitting, he noticed a small child underwater with his hands above his head. Effinger thought to himself, "Hey, this child can really hold his breath," as the inner tube carrying him and his son floated over the top of the submerged child. Instantly it hit him — this child was not holding his breath. The child was motionless, unconscious, perhaps even dead.

"I reached in and grabbed the child and I knew he was in trouble," Effinger said. "I told my wife to take our child, in a tone of voice that quickly stamped the urgency of the situation, and told her, 'I've got to deal with this.'"

Holding his son in one arm, Effinger got out of the inner tube, hooked his foot under the child's chest and grabbed him, pulling him to the surface.

"He was lifeless and purple," Effinger said.

Unbeknownst to Effinger, Dr. Peter Gentry, an emergency room physician at the Biloxi VA Medical Center, was also there enjoying a day with his family.



Craig Effinger, RN
Joint Ambulatory Care
Center, Pensacola

Two GCVHCS employees who had never met work together to save a child

"I looked up and saw Craig steaming through the shallow pool with his child in one arm and the other boy over his other shoulder, yelling for help," Gentry said. "I was closest to the edge of the pool, and I helped him get the child out of the pool. I told Craig I was an ER MD and could help."

The seriousness of the situation struck Gentry immediately.

"He was pulseless, purple, with fixed, dilated eyes," Gentry said, describing the boy's visible condition. "I honestly believed him to be dead."

Effinger shot out of the pool, and with Gentry's help, the heroic duo laid the child poolside and provided medical assistance — Gentry administering CPR and Effinger giving mouth-to-mouth respirations. Maree screamed to the crowd for someone to call 911. At first, after a few quick breaths, Effinger was unable to ventilate the child.

"I can't get any air into this kid," Effinger remembered saying to himself and aloud. He repositioned the child's head to open his airway, which allowed him to ventilate the child.

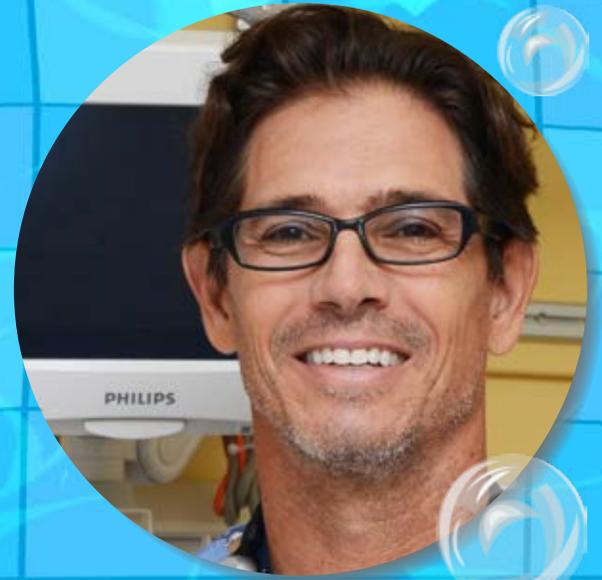
The reverberating laughter and music in the air had since stopped and was replaced with urgency and despair. Scared children who were in the pool ran to their parents, and others gathered around Effinger and Gentry as they assisted the child. Other hotel guests were quietly praying, some on their knees, Gentry said.

By this time, the child's mother, who was vacationing with her family from Dallas, Texas, arrived on the scene. She was instructed by Maree to continue to call her son's name, Javier, out loud, as the VA employees provided medical assistance.

"The mother didn't really speak English, but she seemed to understand what my wife was saying to her," Effinger said.

"I told her, 'Don't stop calling your son — bring him back,'" Maree said.

After two to three minutes of this team approach, the child slowly came to life, dazed, crying and in pain. The child let out a large, loud cry that was like sweet music to Effinger's ears. A sense of calm came over him as the child cried.



Dr. Peter Gentry
Biloxi VAMC Emergency
Department

Suicide awareness is suicide prevention

By TERRY ROZUM
Inspire! Editorial Staff

September is Suicide Awareness Month, and September 15 was Suicide Prevention Day. Every day we should be aware of the facts of suicide and ways to prevent suicides from happening.

Nationally, 2010 VA data showed 22 Veterans die from suicide daily. That number decreased to 20 per day in the latest study done in 2014. "One veteran suicide is one too many..." said Dr. David J. Shulkin, VA Under Secretary for Health. He has called for a focus in assessment, treatment, and understanding to bring the Veteran suicide rate to zero.

According to the article, *Understanding Suicide: 5 Myths About Suicide*, published in 2014 on GoodTherapy.org, statistics show that approximately 40,000 people die in the U.S. yearly from suicide; the tenth-leading cause of deaths among adults. More than 800,000 suicides are completed worldwide, so this is not just a local issue. Most of these men and women never seek professional help or treatment of their depression, anxiety, or pain, which contributes to suicidal thoughts and actions.

These deaths not only have a negative impact on the person who ends their life, but on the community, friends, and family of that person. While improved awareness and understanding help reduce these preventable deaths, removing the stigma of mental illness/mental health is harder to overcome with this public health issue. Read the entire article at www.GoodTherapy.org.

A few of the myths of suicide are:

1. Suicide is not a global issue — *it is*. Some cultures revere suicide as an act of integrity while others view it as an act of shame.
2. When someone fails in an attempt, they will not try again — *false*. Nearly 20 percent of people who try to kill themselves are at more risk of trying again and being successful.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Connect. It matters.
Friendship. It matters.
Ask the question. It matters.
Support.
Compassion. It matters.
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Listen. It matters.

It Matters.

Because one small act can make the difference.

Confidential help for Veterans and their families

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net or text to 838255

3. You cannot stop someone who is determined to kill themselves — *untrue*. Many of those attempting suicide do not want to die, although they do want to end their pain.
4. Asking someone about suicidal thoughts will encourage them to think about it — *untrue*. Asking might open the door for them to talk, but it will not be the first time they thought of it.
5. People who talk about suicide are not serious — *false*. Most people who attempt suicide have confided in someone within days of their suicide or attempt. **Listening saves lives.**
6. Most suicides happen around holidays — *not true*. More completed suicides occur in the spring when it is harder to hide depression.

Getting help and knowing where to get help is critical. The Veterans Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255, press 1, is available 24/7. Find local resources at www.suicide.org or www.stopasuicide.org which provides information on signs and symptoms to watch for; www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org has a chat line with a counselor. Finally, www.thetrevorproject.org offers assistance to the LGBTQ community at risk for suicide.



On July 8, the Mississippi Beach Cruisers presented a check for \$6,000 to the GCVHCS. This generous donation is proceeds from the Honoring Our Veterans Car Show held at the Biloxi VA Medical Center earlier this summer. Pictured (from left): Dr. Christopher Saslo, Associate Director, Patient Care Services; Donnie McFall; Rocky Byrd; Greg Puckett, Acting Director; Leslie Montgomery; Terry Ward; Shanna Pegues, Executive Assistant to the Director; and Bob Davis, Voluntary Service Officer. Thank you, Mississippi Beach Cruisers, for your continued support! The donation will support upcoming activities for our Veterans.

GCVHCS hosts Mental Health Summit in Mobile

More than 100 people participated in the 2016 VA Community Mental Health Summit held in downtown Mobile on Aug. 31.

Representatives from behavioral health and social service agencies across the Gulf Coast met with VA health care staff and Veterans Service Organization leaders. The community partners learned tips for preventing Veteran suicide and ways to help Veterans access behavioral health treatment.

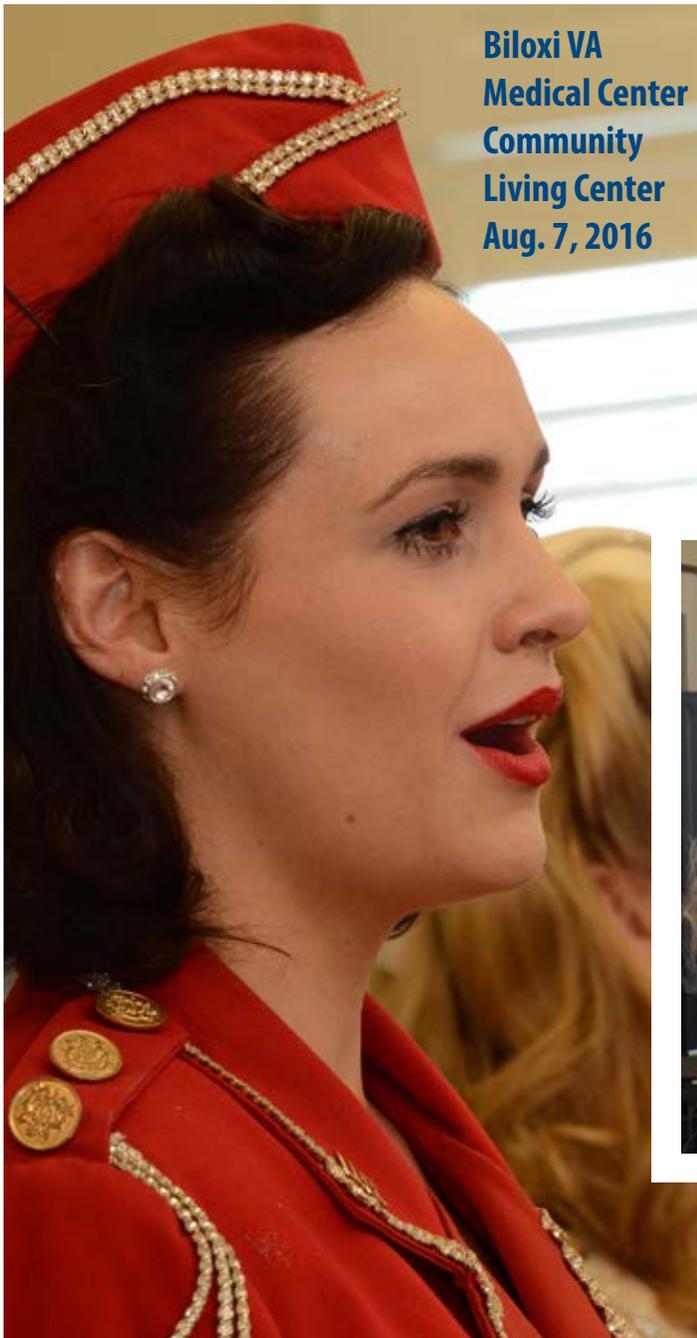


Cynthia S. Selleck, PhD, RN, FAAN, was the keynote speaker at the Community Mental Health Summit.



Rikki Vidak, LCSW, social worker, and John Gunther, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, JACC, Pensacola, participated in the Community Mental Health Summit.

*A*mazing show for our Veterans



Biloxi VA
Medical Center
Community
Living Center
Aug. 7, 2016



Victory Belles

Poolside Patriots from 7

Emergency responders soon showed up on the scene and transported the child to a nearby hospital. Javier was going to be OK. Effinger, who was brimming with adrenaline, then sought to have a conversation with Gentry after the chaotic scene had settled down a bit.

"We started talking and asking each other where the other worked," Effinger said. "Come to find out, we both worked for VA (Gulf Coast)!"

It was at this moment, and in the days after as Effinger processed what happened in his mind, that he felt it was sort of divine intervention that put him and Gentry in that hotel, in that pool, in that moment of time together.

"Maree would never sit in a spot that would be the center of all the action, but rather would have chosen a place in the far corner," Effinger said. "Not this day though, we sat in the middle of everything which would put us in the right place to notice this situation."

Fortunately for the Effingers, Gentrys, and Javier's family, the typical "what if?" questions don't have to be answered, but Effinger said what happened that day has

had a profound impact on him.

"It has strengthened my faith, for sure," Effinger said. "I shared this with my pastor at the church where my children go to day care. We are part of something bigger, whether we know it or not. There was a reason I was in that specific spot that day, and I'm glad it played out like it did."

Gentry heaped praise on Effinger, who never got the chance to meet or speak with Javier's family, after they returned to Dallas later in the week.

"Craig did a great job at the pool," Gentry said. "Not only did he find the child and got him out, but his breathing and airway actions is what saved him."

Effinger reciprocated the praise.

"I'm eternally thankful he (Gentry) was there," Effinger said. "Then to find out he was a Biloxi VA coworker, too? That blows my mind."

On Sept. 1, Effinger returned to the hotel to retrieve a credit card he mistakenly left there on the day of the incident. A member of the hotel staff shared with him that Javier's mother said that their stay in Pensacola was one of the "warmest, family-oriented places she had ever

been to."

Gentry and his family returned to the hotel the following weekend, and hotel staff told them that Javier's family came back to the hotel after he was released from the hospital. They stayed for four or five days, courtesy of the hotel.

With VA employees like Effinger and Gentry around, ready to assist, it's easy to understand why Javier's mother left Pensacola with her impression. Effinger and Gentry showcase this level of service to veterans every day at GCVHCS, through their respective jobs.

"This was truly a lucky day for the boy," Gentry said. "He was found in time by Craig and, by another stroke of luck, I was standing at the side of the pool, the closest person to them."

"I simply did what anyone in my position would hopefully do," Effinger said. "We are all grateful we had a good outcome."

Somewhere in Dallas, Javier and his family probably feel as grateful and lucky too.

*We are all grateful
we had a good
outcome.*





NATIONAL
VETERANS
GOLDEN AGE GAMES

REGISTRATION BEGINS
FEBRUARY 1, 2017

May 7-11, 2017 — Biloxi, MS

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