To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise

...to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan...

by providing Veterans the world-class benefits and services they have earned — and to do so by adhering to the highest standards of compassion, commitment, excellence, professionalism, integrity, accountability and stewardship.

OUR MISSION
Director’s Message

Over the past year, the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System has been in the midst of an historic opportunity to improve the way we serve our Veterans. Troubles with access have threatened Veterans’ confidence in our system. We have been working hard to meet the challenge and to assure Veterans that we are improving access to healthcare. Our ultimate goal is have the right people utilizing the most advanced tools and systems to provide timely, Veteran-centered access to health care. We want Veterans to be in control of how, when and where they wish to be served.

We are striving to provide same-day access to primary care and mental health services, as needed. We want to expand virtual care options, such as telehealth, when appropriate.

The bonds we share with Veterans are a sacred covenant — solemn responsibilities that we have a moral obligation to uphold. Here at the GCVHCS, we offer Veterans an array of programs and services that improve their health and quality of life, whether it’s help with quitting smoking, losing weight, transitioning back into civilian life from the military, incarceration or homelessness, or tackling chronic illnesses like diabetes or high blood pressure — we take care of Veterans from their discharge from service until the end of their lives.

The GCVHCS also provides something else that no non-VA health care system can: a place where Veterans can embrace their journey to recovery with others who share similar military experiences and the military culture that shapes them.

We are honored to have so many talented employees who support Veterans each and every day. We will continue to demonstrate our desire to serve Veterans with the best possible care by upholding the I CARE (Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence) values in everything we say and do.

ANTHONY L. DAWSON, MHA, FACHE
Director
Executive Leadership

ANTHONY L. DAWSON, MHA, FACHE
Director

NEIL J. NUSBAUM, MD
Interim, Chief of Staff

WM. GREGORY PUCKETT, MHA, FACHE
Associate Medical Center Director

M. CHRISTOPHER SASLO
DNS, ARNP-BC, FAANP
Associate Director for Patient Care Services

MOLLIE WEST, MHA, FACHE
Interim, Associate Director
Outpatient Operations
## FUNDS AVAILABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Target Allowance (less CMOP withdrawal)</td>
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<td>State Home</td>
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<td>VACAA (0152XA and 0162XA)</td>
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## PROJECTED OBLIGATIONS

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### All Other (excl. X5 funding and items listed in rows 29-42)

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### SPECIFIC PURPOSE OBLIGATION ADJUSTMENT TOTAL

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<td>VACAA All Other</td>
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<td>Choice</td>
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<td><strong>SPECIFIC PURPOSE OBLIGATION ADJUSTMENT TOTAL</strong></td>
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## TOTAL PROJECTED OBLIGATIONS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL PROJECTED OBLIGATIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>$473,864,362</strong></td>
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Leaders Developing Leaders was launched in late 2015 by VA Secretary Robert “Bob” McDonald, due to FY2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and VA All Employee Survey responses. LDL involves cascading leadership training throughout VA. Directors across VA were given LDL training by VA Central Office and instructed to cascade the training to other leadership and management/supervisory staff at their facilities. They were also tasked with developing and implementing 100-day projects at their facilities. At GCVHCS, the Medical Center Director gave initial LDL training to remaining Pentad members and key management/supervisory staff in January 2016. In April 2016, the Pentad members gave cascaded LDL training to additional management/supervisory staff, including Program Managers. After the April 2016 training, management/supervisory staff were charged with disseminating LDL training throughout their respective Services and Departments. Approximately 22 LDL projects have been initiated or completed at GCVHCS so far. A majority of the projects can be found on VA Pulse.

The I CARE Wall of Fame was created in July 2016 to establish a widespread, highly visible, easy-to-use means of employee recognition. Each month, the Strategic Planner sent an email to management/supervisory staff at GCVHCS, requesting the name of at least one employee in their Service/Department who had displayed at least one of the I CARE Values. Nominated employees had their names placed on digital monitors across GCVHCS; in the GCVHCS employee newsletter, The Beacon; and on the GCVHCS intranet homepage. Additionally, nominated employees received certificates based on the I CARE Value they displayed. Each certificate was hand-signed by the Medical Center Director. Although the I CARE Wall of Fame was sustained for only the fourth quarter of FY2016, 115 unduplicated employees were recognized. Due to the high response level, the I CARE Wall of Fame will continue during FY2017.
New Panama City Beach VA Clinic Opening

It was good news for active-duty military and Veterans in the Panama City Beach area when two new clinics opened at the close of 2016. VA spearheaded the construction of a new Navy Branch Clinic and a VA clinic, located side by side, on property owned by the Navy. Both clinics replaced older, smaller facilities. For VA, the new 30,160 square foot facility will house primary care, laboratory, pharmacy, dental, and many more services.
Outstanding leadership in our business services resulted in a brilliantly executed budget program which closed out at $472M. Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System is the only VISN 16 facility that did not have a budget deficit for the entirety of FY16. As a matter of fact, due to efficient financial oversight, GCVHCS was able to help the VISN by providing $612K in facility funding which was used at other VISN 16 facilities.

Fiscal Service monitored special purpose funding and expenditures. These reports were completed in a timely and accurate manner for the entire year.

The major programs included Hep C, CITC, and Prosthetics and Medical Care Collection Fund collections. GCVHCS achieved an all time high in MCCF collections, closing the year out at 104.7 percent of the collections goal!

The resources of GCVHCS were monitored through accurate accounting and budget practices and preparing and submitting the Flash report timely and accurately to the Pentad for submission to the VISN on a monthly basis.

Expert oversight of Full Time Employees was provided throughout the year and reported to the Resource Management Committee. The facility was within 99.9 percent of the VISN FTE goal and hiring ceiling of 2201 FTE.

GCVHCS business practices are superb as indicated by the Financial Indicator report that reflects a cumulative score of 99.4 percent. The VISN goal was to be above 90 percent.

$473,864,362
Medical Care Budget

BREAKOUT

$76,792,550
Non-VA Care Budget

$28,888,908
MCCF Collections

$788,859
Choice Care in the Community
RPIW team collaborates on ideas during a brainstorming session focused on improving care processes for our Veterans.

**Care in the Community**

CITC is managed effectively and Senior Leadership is actively involved in operations and improvements to the business practices.

Non-VA Care Coordination Service assumed the FEE Pharmacy Program in managing the set-up and processing of the non-VA pharmacy vendors. This initiative resulted in improved turnaround time to process a pharmacy vendor to less than five minutes when all information is provided by Pharmacy. NVCCS’ processing of the non-VA pharmacy vendors, now done in real time, allows Veterans to get their medication without an excessive wait.

NVCCS’ active utilization of the Choice Program ensures Veterans receive health care in a timely manner. To date, NVCCS has processed over 18,341 CITC referrals, with approximately $21 million paid in Choice claims as of September 2016. Choice utilization rates for fourth quarter FY2016 averaged 95 percent.

GCVHCS has 53 provider agreements entered for critical areas such as Dental, Home Health Aides, and inpatient services. We also had outstanding results in Consults Missing Authorizations, as we closed out FY2016 at 3.84 percent, exceeding VISN 16 targets.

Through a successful Rapid Process Improvement Workgroup effort established in April 2016, we established significant program efficiencies in streamlining the tracking, completion and transmittal of all internal and external enrollment/eligibility documentation, within a timely manner for Geriatrics and Extended Care consults. The implementation of the resulting RPIW plan reduced the process of consults from 60 to 30 days. The FY2016 process was sustained and waste was reduced by 25 percent.

NVCCS decreased the number of open consults backlog from 20,000 to 10,000 or less through scheduled Stand Downs and the use of overtime within NVCCS, exemplifying commitment and dedication to service of our Veterans.

GCVHCS’ led the initiative to have Third Party Administrator, TriWest, embedded staff in our facility. TriWest staff are actively engaged in assisting with timely dispositioning of Veterans Choice Program appointments. This initiative provides better communication between TriWest and CITC providers, and enhances customer service to NVCCS frontline staff and Veterans.
Logistics

**LOGISTICS SERVICE**

- Reduced inventory levels below 23 days of stock on hand level for each of the 12 months this fiscal year. Additionally, exceeded MSPV utilization compliance goal of 40 percent each of the 12 consecutive months, ranging from 58 percent to 72 percent compliancy, thereby putting the facility at the top of the VISN and VA nationwide. Received an award from the Deputy Secretary for this effort.

- Equipment Management requisitioned over $7 million of critically needed equipment which improved Veterans access to care.

- Led supply chain efforts for the National Veterans Golden Age Games by receiving, storing, inventorying and purchasing assets valued in excess of $300,000 in preparation for hosting of the 2017 competition by GCVHCS.

EMS

**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SERVICE**

- Expansion of service infrastructure with the new Prosthetics and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation building, Biloxi Campus; and new behavioral health building at the VA Panama City Beach Clinic West, Panama City, Fla., provided opportunities for EMS to demonstrate its commitment to provide excellent environmental services across our health care system’s extended campuses.

- Responsible stewardship of government resources to maximize production by offering laundry and linen services to our sister VA medical centers and DoD partners in the region through laundry processing agreements also demonstrates our commitment to integrity.

Engineering

**ENGINEERING SERVICE**

- Awarded projects in FY2016 totaling $25,059,993.

- Coordinated 2016 Emergency Preparedness Mississippi Community Hospitals exercise based on patients injured from a mass fire in Biloxi VAMC by providing simulated patients to help hospitals receive credit towards meeting standards.

- Successfully implemented and executed GCVHCS-wide Live Process automated notification system to contact 2,000+ employees within minutes of a CODE Purple computer outage potentially impacting patient care.

- GCVHCS selected as Beta site for composing scope of work for NAC equipment requests.

- Received the Greenhealth Award, Partner for Change, presented for significant achievements in sustainability and demonstrating excellence in managing the resources utilized in serving Veterans.

- Achieved 97 percent completion of PMs for non-life support equipment, one of the highest completion rates within VISN 16.
VA/DoD

VA/DoD SHARING COORDINATOR

• Visited all DoD partnered sites to establish relations and determine a base level of opportunities to improve our relationships and identify what we are doing well to share with other sites; resulted in the development of 100 plans to push the services forward.
• Improved business practices by developing a billing submission SOP for all DoD partners; streamlining the process by eliminating a persistent issue of double-billing and duplicate work effort associated with the VA/DoD payment process.
• Laundry Sharing Agreement submitted with the Combat Readiness Training Command.
• Renewed Radiology Sharing Agreement with Tyndall Air Force Base.

MMS

MEDICAL MEDIA SERVICE

• Designed and produced two graphic media products which received national VHA Communication Awards from among a field of 150 VA medical centers: GCVHCS FY2015 Annual Report (First Place Tactic) and Inspire! Newsletter (First Place Tactic).
• Produced Cruisin’ the Coast video segment featured on VA Central Office homepage, providing a public example of our relationship with the community and, in turn, their involvement in caring for and supporting our nation’s Veterans.
• Provided numerous instances of media support to VISN 16 and other medical centers, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to support the demand from other facilities for GCVHCS Medical Media Service’s expertise; for example, Creative Arts Festival videos (Jackson VAMC), SecVA visit photo/video (VISN 16/VBA regional office/Jackson VAMC).

VCS

VETERANS CANTEEN SERVICE/Biloxi

• In response to customer requests, provided a new, additional ATM machine in Primary Care Building 1 to better serve Veterans and staff.
• Through our partnerships with outside businesses, provided a variety of retail items at competitive prices to the Biloxi VAMC and its outpatient clinics.
• Proudly supported and participated in (Biloxi) Feds FEED Families program for FY2016; many items to feed Veterans and their families were purchased at the VCS Patriot Store.
• Proudly participated in VCS’ nationwide partnership with Homeless Coordinators across the nation to assist in distributing Serta mattress sets to Veterans, placed in permanent housing through HUD/VASH initiatives; partnered with Serta to purchase 4,000 queen mattresses and ship truckloads to 50 locations across the nation.

Fresh produce available for Veterans and staff during a seasonal Farmer’s Market sponsored by the VCS at the Biloxi VA Medical Center.
In summer 2016, the New Orleans National WWII Museum’s charming vocal trio, the Victory Belles, took the residents of the Biloxi VA Medical Center Community Living Center on a nostalgic journey through World War II-era musical classics. The audience was treated to a trip down memory lane with the Victory Belles’ spirited performances of such song hits as *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, *Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree*, *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, and *I’ll be Seeing You*, all sung in rich, three-part harmony.
WWII Veteran runs to honor fallen comrades

By MARY KAY GOMINGER
GCVHCS Public Affairs Officer

Veterans and staff members at the Biloxi VA Medical Center hosted a special visitor during FY2016. Ernest (Ernie) Andrus stopped by the hospital to attend a reception in his honor. These days it’s not so easy to get on Andrus’ calendar as the 92-year-old WWII Veteran runs four days a week, in his trek across the country to raise awareness of the sacrifices the men and women of the military made during World War II and all conflicts since that time.

“Freedom isn’t free,” Andrus said. “We can’t forget our comrades that were injured or killed serving and protecting our country. That’s what I hope I can achieve with this run. Plus I always wanted to do this,” he said with a smile.

Once Andrus made up his mind to run across the country, he spent several months planning the trip. Then, in October 2013, he touched the Pacific Ocean near San Diego, turned east, and began jogging. He’s been running ever since and in late January, as he ran along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, VA staff jumped at the chance to invite him over.

“As you can see from this large turnout,” said Anthony Dawson, Director, Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, “we are all in awe of what you are doing and honored to have you here today for a visit. If we switched the numbers of your age making you 29 it would still be an amazing accomplishment. But at 92, wow!”

Here’s how Andrus came to running across the country at age 92:

Ernest Andrus was a corpsman in the Navy, joining at the start of the war. He left the Navy when the war ended in 1945, and enrolled in college on the VA GI Bill, found a job, and went on with his life. He didn’t spend a lot of time dwelling on his experiences during the war, as some did; he said it was too hard to do.

“I wasn’t right in the middle of the action,” Andrus said, “but I saw enough. I found it easier to just not spend a lot of time thinking about those that didn’t come back. Not like some of my crewmates did. Not for a long time.”

As a corpsman aboard a LST (Landing Ship Tank), Andrus said he stayed busy tending to the wounds and illnesses associated with war. He assisted in surgeries, and to this day recalls an amputation performed aboard his ship. As the surgeon began the procedure, the patient needed blood. Andrus was the same blood type so he rolled up his sleeve, while he was holding the IV bag (they didn’t have a pole), and gave blood. He had to do this several times throughout the night. He remembers feeling light-headed and weak.

“We all did what we had to do,” Andrus said. “I didn’t do anything that any other man in our crew wouldn’t have done.”

Andrus’ life ticked along at a normal pace for the next 75 years or so. One day he received a phone call from some of his former crew members, including the skipper, and nothing was ever the same after that.

“We were at a point in our lives when our families were grown, our careers were over, and now we had time to think. So, we began reminiscing about our time in the service. And one thing we all agreed on was we wanted the younger generations to understand the sacrifices so many made which made America the country it is today,” he said.

So the group of about 30 got together and decided they could preserve the memories of life aboard a Navy LST by finding and refurbishing a decommissioned ship and turning it into a floating memorial. They located USS LST-325 in Greece, got it back to America, and it now is available for tour in Indiana. This, of course, took years of red tape, mega-fund raising, and countless hours of coordination, but the group persevered. Maybe a testimony of how WWII Veterans got their ‘greatest generation’ title. Definitely a testimony to Andrus’ sheer grit and determination as he treks across the country to share the message that America must acknowledge and appreciate all that Veterans have done to preserve freedom.

“We have a great country,” Andrus said. “We can’t forget how we got here.”

If all goes as planned, Andrus will arrive on the east coast of Georgia, near Brunswick, on August 20, 2016, one day after his 93rd birthday.

Editor’s Note: 93-year-old WWII Veteran Ernie Andrus completed his nearly 3-year, 2600-mile run across America as he reached the Atlantic Ocean on the coast of St. Simons Island, Ga., on August 20, 2016.
Nationwide, significant strides are being made to end Veteran homelessness community by community. The goal of the Homeless Program is to end homelessness in all locations. Several key components make it a successful and essential service to Veterans at GCVHCS:

- Healthcare for the Homeless Veteran (HCHV)
- Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)
- Grant Per Diem (GPD)
- Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO)
- Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF)
- National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (NCCHV)

The HCHV outreach program started in 2008. At GCVHCS, the HCHV program spans our health care system’s 300-mile primary service area. An HCHV outreach Social Worker is often the first point of contact many Veterans have with VA in the community and this person ensures a warm hand-off within the homeless program or to other services within VA.

Current HUD-VASH vouchers for GCVHCS include 56 additional vouchers allocated in FY2016. Most of the vouchers are being used in housing or the Veteran is in the process of searching for housing. The most vulnerable and chronic homeless Veterans continue to be our priority. Our collaboration with HUD to offer housing vouchers to eligible Veterans has been an integral aspect of our success in providing permanent housing and case management to Veterans.

GPD programs provide transitional housing for up to two years for homeless Veterans as they return to school and seek employment. GPD programs also give them a helping hand as they seek permanent housing and re-engage into the community.

Located in Biloxi, Mobile and Pensacola, our four VJO Specialists provide services within the legal system to connect Veterans to mental health and substance abuse programs in VA. We also have Veterans Courts from Biloxi to Panama City. These services help individuals often struggling with PTSD, addiction, TBI and other medical and mental health issues that can be treated within the VA system, often preventing extended stays in prison or jails and another night of homelessness.

Homeless Stand Downs for FY2016 were held in Pensacola, Eglin and Panama City, Fla. Our Biloxi Homeless Program took part in the Project Homeless Connect events in Harrison and Jackson Counties.

The SSVF program is an integral element of the continuum of services for Veterans at risk or currently homeless. This program provides rental and security deposits and other financial assistance to ensure Veterans maintain permanent housing as well as provides homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing to Veteran households. These grants have been awarded to community providers covering the entire catchment area of our health care system.

The National Homeless Hotline Call Center provides an efficient and effective link for Veterans to receive information and referrals to VA and community resources.
Warrior to Soul Mate workshop facilitated by unique couple

By MARY KAY GOMINGER
GCVHCS Public Affairs Officer

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. Jo said that the skills they have learned in the workshop have made their 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.

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 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.”
• “It will help us regain the strength in our relationship.”
• “Bring a happier, closer, more understanding way of belief to our marriage.”

“We don’t just teach this course, we live it.”
Providing Patient Centered Care

In FY2016, the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation enhanced services to Veterans by entering into partnership with Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Telehealth, and the Office of Information and Technology.

This partnership is a systematic approach to provide whole health care early in the relationship between VA and the Veteran, emphasizing self-care in the larger context of well-being, and incorporating a full range of conventional, complementary, and integrative health approaches. These new partnerships help us continue to focus on each Veteran’s experience in his or her journey to achieving healing relationships and healing environments. The three major landmarks on our journey have been the Ambassador Program, Patient Centered Care Retreats, and the Inspire! Newsletter. All three of these are essential to advancing effective communication, cultural competence, and Veteran and Family-Centered Care. In fact, the Ambassador Program has evolved into enhancing the inpatient experience as well as the outpatient experience with Ambassadors visiting the wards and assisting with the technology for Interactive Patient Care. IPC is a technological tool that enhances the care experience by supporting personalized, proactive, and patient driven health care. In VA inpatient settings, IPC supports greater patient engagement through collection of real-time feedback, allowing more timely resolution of patient concerns and implementation of service recovery. The same is true for our outpatient setting with the use of kiosks.

Whole Health Pathway

As a recipient of an FY2016 grant of $5,000, GCVHCS had many successes, including:

- Overcoming multiple challenges to innovatively and successfully implement the Whole Health Pathway course across the system, utilizing telehealth modality
  - Initiated three cohorts during FY2016; two of the cohorts utilized telehealth technology and the third was face-to-face outreach at a Veteran Center
  - First completed cohort demonstrated an improvement in well-being from an average of 3.7 to 4.8 on a 5.0 scale
Interactive Patient Care: Voice of the Veteran and VetLink Questionnaire

Inpatients and outpatients have an opportunity to provide real-time feedback.

How satisfied are you that you got today’s appointment when you wanted it?

- Satisfied or completely satisfied: 89%
- Neutral: 8.6%
- Dissatisfied or completely dissatisfied: 2.4%

During this hospital stay, staff took my preferences and those of my family or caregiver into account in deciding what my health care needs would be when I left.

- Strongly agree and agree: 100%
- Strongly disagree and disagree: 8.6%

During this hospital stay, staff took my preferences and those of my family or caregiver into account in deciding what my health care needs would be when I left.

Core components supported by sending GCVHCS staff to various Whole Health training sessions

- Implementing Healing Touch services and host additional Level 1 and level 2 clinical Healing Touch courses
- Expanding complementary services by training instructors
Ambassador Program

More than 475 GCVHCS employees and volunteers have received VA Ambassador Program training to better serve Veterans. This allows us to reach and empower more Veterans. In FY2016, over 36,000 Veterans were engaged by friendly, customer service-oriented Ambassadors with an average of 30 Ambassadors serving each month.

One Veteran summed up his experience with, “Those folks wearing red jackets sure are nice. They walked with me to my clinic appointment and helped me solve a problem I was having.”

Inspire! Newsletter

The award-winning Inspire! newsletter continues to highlight best practices in patient centered care and stories of inspiration throughout the health care system. Written by staff and Veterans across the Gulf Coast, Inspire! is dedicated to telling the stories of Veterans in their own words as well as highlighting programs of note as they put the Veterans first in their everyday work. One of our featured Veterans who shared his story about being homeless is now a full-time employee! Employees, Veterans and family members can sign up for the Inspire! and receive it in their e-mail at this link:


PCC Councils, Committees and Work Groups

The following organized groups serve as steering bodies for the PCC model and philosophy. Great ideas are shared, and we’ve had the opportunity to hear from amazing employees and volunteers.

- **Patient Satisfaction Committee**: Meets monthly and is comprised of service chiefs and program managers responsible for providing personalized, proactive and patient-driven health care and initiatives. The role of this committee is to monitor, analyze, and communicate results of patient satisfaction performance improvement measures for the GCVHCS. There are also three Veteran advisors on this committee.

- **Veteran and Family Advisory Council**: Meets quarterly and is comprised mostly of Congressional and community stakeholders. The function of the VFAC is to work with GCVHCS leadership to identify areas of improvement to better meet the needs of Veterans and their families.

- **Courtesy, Professionalism and Respect/I CARE Committee**: Meets monthly and is comprised of service chiefs and program managers. The purpose of this workgroup is to provide “real time” initiatives for improvement based on the Veteran experience and employee satisfaction within GCVHCS.

- **VISN 16 Voice of the Veteran Subcommittee**: Meets monthly and is comprised of Patient Centered Care Coordinators, Health Systems Specialists and Customer Service Directors. This subcommittee analyzes data from a variety of sources, such as SHEP, SAIL, PATS, and Voice of the Veteran real time feedback system. Data is presented via a dashboard, with suggested targets, and reviewed by the subcommittee. The Voice of the Veteran Subcommittee focuses on access measures and questions with the most potential from the Attributable Effects Report.

- **VISN 16 PCC Coordinators**: Meets monthly and is comprised of PCC Coordinators in VISN 16. The purpose is to share feedback about PCC initiatives and best practices.
When Army veteran Marvin Everest returned to the Mississippi Gulf Coast last fall, he did so with fond memories of the area. His father, while in the Air Force, was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, and Marvin remembers living here as a child.

“My family moved around a lot, as most military families do,” Marvin said. “I have good memories of this area. My brother lives here too. So the decision to move back wasn’t too hard,” he said.

Marvin moved from the Seattle, Wash., area. Shortly after he settled in, he began looking for somewhere to fit in. Because of his military background, he ended up at the Biloxi VA Medical Center.

“Being an Army veteran, I knew I wanted to get involved in some way with the military. Several people suggested I come out to the VA. So, I did. I found my way to Volunteer Services. That was back in September and I’ve been volunteering here ever since.”

Marvin doesn’t have just one volunteer job. He works three days a week as an Ambassador, greeting Veterans and escorting them to their clinics. Two days a week he works in the Chaplain’s office.

“When I read the duties of an Ambassador, I was apprehensive at first, but I decided to give it a try,” Marvin said. “I cannot express the pure joy I feel assisting and interacting with Veterans and finding ways to encourage them,” Marvin explained. “When I am walking them to their destination, we talk. I get to know them. And what’s more important is that now I feel part of this VA family. The employees here really care about the Veterans, and each other. I get to be a part of the family and for that I am grateful.”

Last month Marvin was selected by the Patient Centered Care Coordinator to be one of five staff to attend a three-day Whole Health Facilitator Course in New Jersey, sponsored by the VHA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation. He was the only volunteer in the group. Marvin, and the other facilitators, will lead Veterans through a nine-week course that helps their fellow Veterans choose areas in their life they would like to change.

“It’s very rewarding to have the opportunity to see the organization from the inside as opposed to a 30-second sound bite from the media,” Marvin said. “That’s not the real story. I hear stories all the time from Veterans, like the gentleman that told me the other day that he just got a clean bill of health; he is cancer free. That’s the kind of stories that the public should hear about. And I get to hear them all the time. I love my job at VA.”
Voluntary Services provides quality assistance and service to Veterans and GCVHCS employees. Recreation Therapy supports all Voluntary Service sponsored events. We work together, as a team, to help meet the needs of our Veterans.

54,744
TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS
(equates to 29 FTE)

23,062
Combined volunteer hours
Biloxi, Miss., and Mobile, Ala.

31,682
Combined volunteer hours
Pensacola, Eglin and Panama City, Fla.

$1,473,854
TOTAL IMPACT: HOURS/DONATIONS

$1,234,477
Volunteers Hourly Value
(54,744 X $22.55)

$239,377
Total Donations
Monetary: $31,620
Nonmonetary: $207,757

629
VOLUNTEERS
on rolls at end of FY2016

325
Biloxi/Mobile

281
Pensacola/Eglin/Panama City

18
NEW VOLUNTEERS
(Orientation)

9
Biloxi

20
Pensacola

8
QUARTERLY VAVS
COMMITTEE MEETINGS

4
Biloxi

4
Pensacola
In June 2016, Veteran Mike Downs (seated) accepts a tryke from Ambucs Mid-South Coordinator Gordon Brigman. National Ambucs, Inc. is a nonprofit charitable organization dedicated to creating mobility and independent for people with disabilities.

The **Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network** continues to provide outstanding service to Veterans. Veterans are transported to the Biloxi VAMC from Pensacola, Fla., and Foley and Mobile, Ala.. DAV VTN operates two DAV vans which pick up patients in Harrison, Hancock, Jackson, Greene, Pearl River, Stone and George counties in Mississippi. Veterans are also transported to Pensacola from Panama City, Fla.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patients Transported</th>
<th>Hours Logged</th>
<th>Miles Logged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1,909</strong> Biloxi</td>
<td><strong>3,564</strong> Biloxi</td>
<td><strong>68,545</strong> Biloxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1,117</strong> Pensacola</td>
<td><strong>3,681</strong> Pensacola</td>
<td><strong>77,390</strong> Pensacola</td>
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Voluntary Services provides volunteers to assist staff in the Community Living Center, Blind Rehabilitation Center and Mental Health facilities. During our quarterly Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services Committee meetings, we continually encourage Veterans Service Organizations to support the programs in these facilities. The VSOs have responded by providing health and comfort items, special meals, and taking our residents on outings.

**Successful Projects and Activities**

- Volunteer participation in special events, holidays and regular scheduled activities has been outstanding during FY2016. Volunteers and VSOs provided tremendous support for events such as Fall Carnival, Cruisin’ the Coast, Veterans Day program, Christmas Gift Shop, Christmas Cheer, National Salute to Veteran Patients, and our annual Honoring our Veterans Car Show.
- Cruisin’ the Coast continues to be a very popular event. Each year, antique and vintage car owners converge on the Mississippi Gulf Coast for a week of festivities and car shows. One of the most popular venues on the Cruisin’ schedule is the Cruise-In honoring Veterans at our health care facility. The event was held at MGM Park in Biloxi, Miss.
- The Knights of Columbus again sponsored their annual Veterans Day program at our Biloxi campus. After the program, all attendees were treated to a wonderful fish fry sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, American Red Cross, and DAV. Approximately 180 Veterans attended this event.

(continued on page 22)
• The American Legion Auxiliary-sponsored Christmas Gift Shop was very successful. They provided free gifts for our residents and Day Treatment patients to give to loved ones. In addition to providing the gifts, they wrapped each gift and paid the postage for gifts that were mailed. Our residents and patients really appreciated the gift shop, and they were thrilled at the opportunity to select gifts for their loved ones. One hundred and forty-one Veterans participated in the gift shop and 370 gifts were distributed. Total value of gifts and postage was $3,443. In addition to the Christmas Gift Shop, the ALA distributed monetary gifts of $12 each to 210 Veterans for a total value of $2,520.

• Voluntary Services, in conjunction with The Blood Center of New Orleans, La., sponsored three very successful blood drives. Our facility obtains blood and blood products from The Blood Center. Voluntary Services requested blood drive recruiters from each service. A representative from The Blood Center provided the recruiters with literature about qualified donors, sign-up sheets and posters advertising the blood drives. The Blood Center met its collection goal during each blood drive due to the generosity of GCVHCS employees. A total of 140 pints of blood were collected and 150 employees participated in the blood drives.

• During the annual National Salute to Veteran Patients several activities were held at the Biloxi facility and outpatient clinics. Service organizations from Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida helped to support the events. Our biggest event during National Salute was the annual Mardi Gras parade in Biloxi. We had a walking parade with patients throwing beads and moon pies to onlookers. After the parade, the King and Queen were formally announced at the resident Veterans’ Mardi Gras reception. Veterans also enjoyed cookouts, bingo socials, and ice cream socials. Valentines were distributed to Veterans at all facilities. Visitors from the local community showed their appreciation by visiting our resident Veterans and thanking them for their service.

• In May, the Mississippi Beach Cruisers Car Club sponsored the “Honoring Our Veterans Car Show.” This show included participants from across the Gulf Coast. This was a very successful event and our Veterans really enjoyed it. The Mississippi Beach Cruisers Car Club donated $6,000 to our medical center for patient activities. Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss., and Naval Construction Battalion Center in nearby Gulfport, Miss., provided military personnel to escort resident Veterans to the events and to view the cars.

• The annual Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services awards program and luncheon was nothing short of outstanding. Each year, staff members treat the volunteers to a musical performance. This year’s event was held at VFW Post 2434.

GCVHCS’s choir, along with individual performers, entertained the volunteers. Service Chiefs and others in leadership positions served the meal and assisted people needing help going through the buffet line. VAVS awards programs were also held for volunteers at the outpatient clinics in Pensacola, Eglin and Panama City, Fla. More than 300 volunteers and their guests attended the ceremonies.

• Seabees from the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Gulfport, Miss., constructed a horseshoe pit. The patients were very appreciative of their hard work. Pitching horseshoes is a favorite pastime for our residents.

Community Relations and Activities

• Keesler Air Force Base and the Naval Construction Battalion Center continue to provide outstanding support. They provided over 200 active-duty personnel to assist with special events during FY2016. Camp Shelby’s Youth Challenge Program provided 50 personnel to support special events.

• Local high school JROTC Units participated in several events during the fiscal year, including our annual Veterans Day Ceremony and POW Luncheon.
We appreciate our community donors...

VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATION
American Legion
American Legion Auxiliary
Disabled American Veterans
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary
Military Order of the Cootie
Forty & Eight
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National Order of the Trench Rats
Wounded Warriors
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Blind Veterans of America
American Veterans (AMVETS)
Marine Corps League
Sons of AMVETS
Sons of American Legion

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATION
BPO Elks
American Red Cross
Salvation Army
Pizzas 4 Patriots
DVD 4 Vets
Mississippi Beach Cruisers
Soldiers Angels
Project Healing Waters
Run n Tri
Bradford O’Keefe Funeral Home
Cruisin’ the Coast
Gulf Coast Federal Credit Union
Moose Lodge
Daughters of the American Revolution
Masonic Lodge
Knights of Columbus
U. S. Marine Inc.
Beau Rivage Casino and Resort
Hard Rock Casino and Resort
AT&T Call Center
AT&T Pioneers
Coastal Development Group
Golden Nugget
Family Dollar Store
MGM
Stein Mart
Memorial Hospital at Gulfport
Biloxi Shuckers
Friendship Missionary Baptist Church
New Life Family Church
New Journey
3% Club
Mississippi Royal Rugby Team
Mobile County Health Department
Poolside Heroes

By JERRON BARNETT, GCVHCS Public Affairs Specialist

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.

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

“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.

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. “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.

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

“Dr. Peter Gentry
Biloxi VAMC Emergency Department
Blind Rehabilitation Center

Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center had a great year. We admitted 188 Veterans from more than 13 states into the program, with an average length of stay of 33.5 days. The average wait time from referral to admission was 56 days.

We received training on the OrCam in October 2015 and added it to our training options right away. We are training Veterans to use the device which combines an optical character reader with the ability to save pictures for facial recognition and object recognition. While the OrCam is not appropriate for everyone, Veterans using it appreciate the portability and are enjoying the updated features that came with Version 7’s release.

A Pre/Post-Assessment has been implemented in each skill area. This will let Blind Rehabilitation Specialists and VIST Coordinators know as accurately as possible the starting point of each Veteran on goals and the ending point at discharge time to show the growth achieved through training.

Satisfaction ratings for our program have been high this year. Results on the anonymous survey filled out at discharge and sent to CARF, our accrediting body, gave a Veteran Satisfaction Rate of over 98 percent for FY2016. In the Exit Interviews conducted before discharge, the average Veteran rating in all of the skill areas was at least a four out of five overall.

On September 14, the GCBRC celebrated our fifth anniversary with a delicious cookout, celebratory cake and punch. It is hard to believe how far we have come in just a handful of years and how much we have grown from when we opened our doors to just four Veterans that first week.

Veteran Comments:

• “The Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center is the finest, by far, of any organization I have been involved with, civilian or military. They restored my life.”

• “It is an honor for me to report to you that this staff and facility reflect a professionalism and pride that far exceed expectations. The people that work at the Biloxi VA reflect greatly upon the Veterans Administration.”

• “The help I received from one and all was outstanding. I would rate the Center #1.”
Veterans discuss issues with GCVHCS Leadership during the town hall meeting held Oct. 12 at the Biloxi VA Medical Center.

We’re listening: Town Halls

Caring for Veterans is a calling, and our first commitment is to provide Veterans and their families the timely, quality care and benefits they have earned and deserve through their service to our Nation. Last year the GCVHCS held bi-monthly Town Hall meetings across the health care system as a way to seek continual improvement and to learn directly from those who use our system.
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.
MOBILE, Ala. — Saturday, May 21, 2016, was declared Mr. Johnnie Brown Day in Mobile, Ala., by Gina Gregory, Mobile City Council President, District 7. To commemorate the date, the Army Veteran threw out the first pitch at the Bay Bears Minor League baseball game that day.

Born and raised in Mobile, Ala., Brown was, and still is, an avid baseball fan. After being drafted to the U.S. Army and serving in Vietnam from 1964 to 1966, he returned to Mobile to play for the semi-pro teams Allenmile Sluggers and Paradise Blue Devils. He played among many of the baseball greats, including hometown hero Hank Aaron.

In Vietnam, he served his tour of duty in the Army 18th Artillery, 2nd Division as Artillery and Gunner. During his service, he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal and the National Defense Medal with Bronze Star. He also served in the Army Reserve from 1966 to 1968. Brown used his GI benefits to graduate from Spalding Business College and Southwestern Trade School as a machinist.

Currently, Brown is active in his local community politics and civic organizations. He is an officer with Disabled American Veterans Chapter 7.

When asked how it felt to throw out that pitch, he said, “It felt good to me because I was able to face a crowd without being angry!” He says he felt supported by his family, friends, and DAV members, and that he hopes to get the opportunity to do it again.

Thank you, Mr. Johnnie Brown, for your service to your country and your community.
Singing and dancing and lots of fun at the Biloxi VAMC Lip-Sync Contest to raise contributions for the annual Combined Federal Campaign for charity.

Beauty and brains...this small pup is a service dog trained to help Veterans through pet therapy.

Our staff’s broad cultural heritage is delightfully demonstrated during an EEO event performance.
Take Your Child to Work Day participants at the Joint Ambulatory Care Center, Pensacola, Fla., get a hands-on look at health care processes.

Memorial Day Ceremony
Biloxi VAMC
Biloxi National Cemetery
Integrity
Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

Commitment
Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA’s mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

Advocacy
Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Respect
Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

Excellence
Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes and rigorous in correcting them.

myVA
Putting Veterans First

GCVHCS Director Anthony L. Dawson signs the myVA Access Declaration pledging to provide our Veterans with timely, Veteran-centered health care, during the April 20 signing ceremony.
GCVHCS facilities are located in scenic areas across the Gulf Coast region. The coastal beaches near our facilities in Florida offer breathtaking views of towering sand dunes and crystal blue waters.

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