



**September 2012**

# VA NORTHERN INDIANA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM **Northern [High] Lights**

A Monthly Newsletter for Employees, Volunteers, & Patients

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## Upcoming Events

**The Wall That Heals**  
September 20-23, 2012,  
Marion  
traveling exhibit,  
For information visit:  
[www.vvmf.org/twth](http://www.vvmf.org/twth)

## **Operation Wellness & Nutrition**

By Dacia Overbey



Our local Operation Wellness and Nutrition (O.W.N.) group was created locally through VA Northern Indiana Health Care System Staff's initiative and is led by a Dietician, a Social Worker, and a Recreation Therapist. Through team work and creative thinking, this program gives Veterans in the Veterans Community Living Center the opportunity to participate in socialization and physical activities in a relaxed setting with their peers and interdisciplinary staff.

During the weekly sessions, interdisciplinary staff participate in activities with the Veterans and discuss benefits of physical exercise. Dietician Shelly Wallin provides Veterans education material which includes information on nutrition and wellness. Social Worker Gina Deaton provides the Veterans with behavioral health education and information. Recreation Therapist Jeff Dehmer creates and coordinates various activities for Veteran and staff participation. Volunteers from Voluntary Service assist and encourage participation with O.W.N.

The group session is held Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for approximately 45 minutes. Each group session begins with stretching and ends with a physical activity. To date, O.W.N. has played modified basketball and baseball, balloon volleyball, worked with the parachutes, balloons, and resistance bands. O.W.N continues to expand with a larger variety of activities including the recent Olympics activities which will be held in the Atrium. Units on the Veteran Community Living Center will be competing for the Gold over the next few weeks.

This is an example of VANIHC'S top notch employees! This program was created and implemented by the staff for the betterment of our Veterans.

## From the Director:



In the past month I have been walking throughout the hospital twice a day interacting with employees. This has been a great opportunity for me to learn more about you and your work areas. I believe it has also been an opportunity for you to learn more about me.

During my rounds, I have observed many employees in their work environment and have stopped to ask questions about their job, their work environment, and the overall VANIHCS culture. The message I have received overall is very positive and I appreciate your feedback and suggestions. All feedback can make a difference in the overall climate of the organization if it is constructive and for the betterment of the Veterans. Therefore, your negative feedback is just as important as the positive. I have taken your comments and concerns back to the leadership team and we have implemented some suggestions and made many follow up inquiries regarding your concerns.

Finally, in the coming weeks you will not only see me during morning and afternoon rounds you will also see your leadership team making rounds as well. This is how we as leaders will gain a better understanding of you, our employees.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brent A. Thelen".

Brent A. Thelen, Ph.D.  
Interim Director

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## Engineering Department Cultural Improvements

By: Jessica Morris



The VA Northern Indiana Health Care System (VANIHCS) Engineering Department is undergoing a culture improvement. This improvement is to benefit you the customer. What is the new culture? It's the Engineering Department's commitment to provide exceptional customer service not only to our external customers, but to our internal customers, as well.

The driving force behind this culture change is simple. Veteran's and staff alike deserve a safe and functional facility. By providing a safe and functional facility, VANIHCS staff will be able to fulfill our mission of serving Veteran's. With this in mind, Engineering decided it was time to step up their game and rise to the top in VANIHCS customer service. To do this, the Engineering Department employees have set a goal to complete work orders within the established priority level completion time frames and to increase communication between the work order requestors, work order coordinators, shop supervisors, and tradesman. The Engineering staff have made personal commitments to being friendly and courteous, and to educate staff on the work order processes to help improve it.

I encourage you in the month of September to take a moment and thank your Engineering Department for their hard work and continuous drive to excel in customer service.

# A Miracle in Mississippi

By: Donna Kramer



Some of you may know Mr. Walter Gibbs. He's a patient on 172-1B. In 1961, while serving as an Army Private First Class at Camp LeRoy Johnson, New Orleans, LA, Walter met his wife, JoAnn. After 34 years of marriage, Walter and JoAnn have four children and ten grandchildren. But what you may not know is Mr. Gibbs' survival story.

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, Walter was there. As the water quickly rose inside his home and unable to get out, he headed for higher ground...the attic. After being trapped for hours and finding no way to escape, Walter decided to make one. He dove down into the cold, dark water that was once his home and his hands miraculously closed around a familiar tool, his axe. Swimming back to the attic, he wasted no time in chopping a hole in the roof. For three days, Walter laid on the roof, alone, afraid and not knowing if his family

had survived. He was finally rescued by boat and taken to the New Orleans Convention Center and then on to Fort Smith, AK. Walter was later able to reconnect with his family.

Thanks, Walter, for sharing your story of courage, determination, perseverance, and hope. Your survival story is an inspiration to everyone.

## Plaque of Honor Ceremony

By: Vonda Jackson



August 21, 2012, a special ceremony occurred on 172-1B (the Palliative Care Unit). We are blessed with a special group of ladies that have donated money for remembrance plaques. These were placed on 172-1B in memory of their husbands who were all once 1B patients. These ladies also donated a plaque honoring 172-1B staff. They will continue adding plaques as individual Veterans pass away as an ongoing tribute. These women have given so much

of themselves for the care of not only their loved ones, but to Veterans that they did not even know prior to their husbands entering the VA.

They visited daily, always with a smile for everyone, words of encouragement and good cheer. Even after their husbands passed away, many of them still come and visit other Veterans on the unit. They have given both love and support to the staff and have formed friendships that will last a lifetime. All of these ladies contributed money for a plaque to a Veteran that had no visitors, but they wanted this special Veteran to be remembered. It is an honor and a privilege to have these wonderful ladies with true hearts of gold to be a part of 172-1B. They all truly emulate the I CARE values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence. We will always honor and remember them as well as their husbands and our Veterans.



## September Events

**September 8 & 9, 2012**  
Salute to Veterans of WWII  
Vincennes (Knox Co., South  
Central Reg.)

**September 9, 2012**  
National Grandparents Day

**September 11, 2012**  
Patriot Day

**September 21, 2012**  
POW/MIA ceremony  
Fort Wayne campus  
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and  
Marion campus  
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**September 28, 2012**  
Muncie Stand Down:  
Location: Muncie Mission  
1725 South Liberty Street,  
Muncie, IN 47302  
Time: 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

# Congratulations!



Tresa Odle, has recently completed an eight-month Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Flow Academy course. Tresa has worked very hard to fulfill the requirements of the course and has demonstrated ability to apply the operations management

science principles and tools learned in the Flow Academy.

# Looking for Volunteers

VANIHCS has a Palliative/Hospice program for the Veterans. Our Hospice program has a “No Veteran Dies Alone” program which consist of volunteers. The program has a need for volunteers for the Marion and Fort Wayne campuses. Volunteers are such a vital role and necessary aspect for Hospice. Volunteers provide their presence during the Veteran’s final journey. The volunteers would provide comfort by just being present at the bedside demonstrating empathy, sensitivity, respect and unconditional acceptance for all hospice patients and their loved ones. Volunteering in hospice can be very rewarding. According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), more than 460 thousand hospice volunteers deliver more than 20 million hours of service annually.

# Employee Picnic



## Northern [High] Lights

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For Any Questions or Concerns Please Contact:

Sheryl Grubb  
Public Affairs Officer  
260.426.5431, extension 71512

