



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Bonne Santé

Fall 2015



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Engaging Veterans and Stakeholders

in **myVA** Initiatives

By Debra Ceaser-Winbush

The MyVA initiative has been implemented at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, including the creation of a MyVA Community Council.

Chairpersons Bill Detweiler and Larry Jones, who are Veterans and community stakeholders, signed the MyVA charter on July 8, putting the council into effect. On July 29, the first MyVA Community Council meeting to enhance strategic partnerships was held, introducing the initiative to members and stakeholders who regularly attend the Joint Advisory Council meeting.

“Bill and I will work with the MyVA Community Council to help ensure that Veterans are provided with a cohesive and friendly customer service experience,” said Jones.

While maintaining a Veteran-centric mindset is integral to the success of the campaign, it is not the only intangible being put into practice. MyVA also lays out goals to achieve support service excellence, establish a culture of continuous performance improvement, and improve the employee experience by focusing on “people and culture.” All these things enhance each other and ultimately lead back to providing the best care to Veterans.

“In addition to empowering employees to strengthen the organization by taking the initiative to improve customer service, support services, partnerships and processes, it eliminates barriers to serving Veterans,” continued Jones.

This modernization is ultimately intended to improve the way the Department of Veterans Affairs interacts internally and with the Veteran population it serves. In addition to community councils, the initiative contains an outline for how VA will activate and realign existing resources. Over the coming months, both Veterans and SLVHCS employees will see a more visible presence of tools like the “Blueprint for Excellence,”

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Bill Detweiler and Larry Jones, MyVA Community Council chairpersons, address attendees of the first meeting of the newly-formed partnership at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System July 29. (Photo by Amanda Jones)



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On the Cover

**Dr. Ralph Schapira,
SLVHCS’
new chief of staff,
address the Academic
Partners Conference
on Sept. 30, 2015.**

Photo by Anne Marino

SLVHCS doctor among 'Women of the Year'

By Tyler Grimes



Photo by Tyler Grimes

Dr. Rebecca Metzinger, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Ophthalmology chief, talks with Veteran JoAnn Mitchell after an eye examination Aug. 26.

“What I find is that the Veterans have a great experience coming here, and there’s a sense of comradery here that is very special.”

**Dr. Rebecca Metzinger,
SLVHCS Ophthalmology chief**

Dr. Rebecca Metzinger, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Ophthalmology chief, was selected to be one of New Orleans’ “Women of the Year” for 2015 by CityBusiness, a local trade newspaper of business and corporate professionals.

Metzinger is among 50 women who were chosen for their professional and community accomplishments to receive the annual award. She was recognized for her work serving Veterans at SLVHCS.

“It certainly is an honor to receive the award because it is a reflection of the great things going at our medical center,” Metzinger said. “And I am happy to see someone in the community is noticing it.”

Part of the award recognizes her work with SLVHCS in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Metzinger, who started working with SLVHCS in 2008, says she was encouraged to join the Department of Veterans Affairs while attending Tulane University School of Medicine. It was there where she witnessed the work being done for Veterans despite losing the New Orleans medical center.

“It was shocking to see the devastation of Hurricane Katrina but also inspiring in the way the people of the VA really rallied through difficult times,” she said. “It’s hard to lose your whole hospital and still manage to take care of the people who need you.

When she joined VA, Metzinger was part of a national effort to improve Veterans eye care at SLVHCS. Her involvement included helping to stand up the eye clinic and recruiting health care professionals to join her staff.

The eye clinic, which opened in December 2010, served about 19,000 Veterans in fiscal year 2015. She credits the success of the eye clinic to the excellence of her team.

“I feel we have one of the best departments in the city and we provide the best care for our Veterans,” she said. “What I find is that the Veterans have a great experience coming here and there’s a sense of comradery here that is very special.”

For the past seven years, Metzinger says that she and her husband feel a commitment to the Veterans and the city of New Orleans to stay because they knew they could help. It would have been easy to walk away but she and her husband felt like if people who can help leave the city, then what would be left?

“So, I feel good about what we’ve done in our small role in the rebuilding process,” she said.

The 17th annual “Women of the Year” luncheon was held on Nov. 12 where the overall “Woman of the Year” was announced.

VA Career Fair welcomes over 1,000 job seekers



Photo by Anne Marino

By Tyler Grimes

It seemed like a rock concert. People, as far as the eye could see, lined up, waiting and excited to be there. Members of the media set up lights and cameras as they prepared to go live, and interview various individuals. Early birds, arriving hours before the event was scheduled, looked for some sort of advantage over the competition. But this was no music event, this was the career fair hosted by Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System on Aug. 3, in New Orleans.

The recruitment event was part of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Media Day and gave those seeking employment a chance to learn about current job opportunities. Applicants also met with SLVHCS staff members to discuss the different services available to Veterans and what to expect as employees prepare for opening the new medical center by the end of 2016.

"People were really interested to hear about what we do," said Mark Morgan, Nutrition and Food Service chief. "We are expanding our services and will be going from a staff of 14 to about 90."

Morgan explained to the people he spoke with the importance of VA's mission and how much Southeast Louisiana Veterans need the state-of-the-art, 200-bed tertiary care regional referral center. Fernando O. Rivera, SLVHCS medical center director, was also on hand to greet attendees and talk about the meaningful work being done at VA. Rivera recalls one interaction with a Veteran who was eager to serve those who served.

"The Veteran said 'I was homeless and VA saved my life, it would mean the world to me to come back and serve VA,'" Rivera commented. "That's outstanding."

Over the course of the day, more than 400 resumes were collected including almost 70 from doctors and nurses hoping to help fulfill President Abraham Lincoln's promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

Mike Avist, SLVHCS training instructor, was at the career fair to inform the potential candidates about the many training and educational benefits of being part of VA.

"My overall impression of the event was that it was successful beyond our expectations," Avist said. "I believe that the career fair showed the people of the community that we are serious about hiring the best local talent that this city has to offer."

With approximately 150 Veterans joining the pool of applicants, Avist, a Veteran himself, explained why working for VA is more than just a job for those who served.

"I did speak to several Veterans that separated and retired from the military, and they each expressed a deep desire to work with our Veteran patients," he said.

In New Orleans, a city still recovering from Hurricane Katrina 10 years later, residents and Veterans seem excited about the state-of-the-art medical center and what it means to an area hit by the worst natural disaster in the United States in recent history, said Rivera, a New Orleans native.

"We are building a place that our Veterans deserve and our community needs," Rivera said. "That's why this career fair is so important; we must have a robust and high-quality staff ready to serve the 70,000 enrolled Veterans who may come through our doors."

The career fair was also a way for SLVHCS to attract candidates in an extremely competitive market with many medical facilities.

"We need to hire the best and brightest," Rivera said. "We are not the only medical center in town. Health care providers have a lot of job options and we need to make them want to join our team."

In addition to job seekers, members of the local media covered the career fair before, during and after the event with interviews of SLVHCS leaders, including Inger Alston, Human Resources Management Service chief.

Human Resources Management Service representatives briefed groups of a couple hundred candidates at a time in the auditorium in the recently remodeled administrative building, which serves as the recruitment center for the health care system. Sitting in the shadow of the ongoing construction of the new medical center, the recruitment center is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 2400 Canal Street in New Orleans.

See job seekers on page 13



Photo by Anne Marino

Dr. Ralph Schapira, SLVHCS' new chief of staff

by Karla Marshall

Recently I sat down with Dr. Ralph Schapira, the new Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System chief of staff, to learn about his move to New Orleans and more importantly, his vision for the future of Veterans health care in southeast Louisiana.

Q: You've been in New Orleans for a couple of months now. What made you leave your old job as chief of staff at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center?

A: Actually, I wasn't thinking about changing jobs and was happy as chief of staff in Philadelphia. One afternoon, a colleague called me to ask if I knew of an experienced chief of staff who might be interested in taking on the challenging role of chief of staff for Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System. I was so taken with hearing about the opportunity that I quickly thought to myself that the position could be career-defining for me. So much so, that I thought I would like to apply.

Q: What opportunities got your attention?

A: There are a few. The opportunity to work with an interdisciplinary team to contribute to the activation of a new medical center is one that rarely becomes available. The fact that it was in New Orleans was even more attractive given the devastation of Katrina and the community's dedication and commitment to rebuild, including its health care system. The successful opening of the new medical center could add to the well-being of the greater community. When I interviewed, I was immensely impressed with the spirit of the employees I met and knew that I wanted to have the chance to be part of the team to accomplish a goal that would have such a positive impact. When I interviewed with Mr. Rivera, he shared with me what motivated him to return to New

Orleans while serving as a VISN director in Washington D.C. His heartfelt commitment to New Orleans and the community in which he grew up was compelling.

Q: Why did you choose medicine for a career?

A: I grew up in New York City, though I left at age 20 and have since experienced life in different parts of the country. My parents are both first generation



Photos by Anne Marino

Americans and they instilled in me a sense of passion for contributing to community and supporting those who came from difficult life circumstances or life events. I liked taking care of people and medicine was a good fit, especially the VA with its broad-based missions of contributing to the well-being of Veterans.

Q: Where did you go to medical school?

A: I went to medical school at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, Texas. I graduated in 1984 and did an internal medicine residency at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia followed by a fellowship at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina in pulmonary disease and critical care medicine. After a long hiatus in Wisconsin (my wife is from Michigan and our three children were born in Wisconsin), I moved to Philadelphia in 2011 and then of course, to New Orleans a couple of months ago.

Q: What is your favorite part of being a doctor?

A: I am grateful for the opportunity to help people make their lives better. Not just their immediate or critical health care needs, but the entire spectrum of health care. Helping people recover from illness and lead healthy, productive lives is immensely gratifying. I also find the interdisciplinary approach to health care rewarding – working with the entire spectrum of individuals in the workplace to meet the goals of providing great care. Who you work with on a day-to-day basis can be one of the joys of life. It makes all the difference, especially in health care when even the best of days bring new challenges.

Q: What do you see as your biggest challenge at SLVHCS?

A: Activating the new medical center while delivering high quality and Veteran-focused care is the biggest challenge, but also the reason I took the job. I've worked in two large tertiary care VA medical centers and transforming SLVHCS into a 24 hr/day referral medical center is going to take lots of thoughtful planning from every employee. And, we aren't moving from one active hospital into another, but starting a hospital where none currently exists. Much has changed in the delivery of health care in the years since New Orleans has had a VA hospital, so it is going to look a lot different than what existed. There are other challenges, too, such as redefining and rebuilding the relationship between SLVHCS and its academic affiliates (LSU and Tulane) and developing new affiliations with a range of community institutions and organizations. It is a great time to be in New Orleans, especially for those of us who have the honor of serving Veterans. Excellent, patient-centered care is what we do here and I'm proud to be a part of this team.



Dr. Ralph Schapira is fully engaged with staff, community partners and patients in his new role as SLVHCS chief of staff. (Photo by Anne Marino)



and "I CARE" materials. I CARE is an acronym for Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence – a simple reminder to help providers and support personnel maintain their focus on the Veterans they care for.

The plan aims to institute change nationwide that will see a more consistent approach to customer service. By the end of next year, MyVA should make Veterans' experiences easier. There will be a single, customer-facing website and telephone number for ease of access to information. There will also be greater Veterans Benefits Administration presence in Veterans Healthcare Administration facilities. "Our goal is to improve both the Veterans' and employees' experiences," said SLVHCS Medical Center director Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE.

"I am convinced that this initiative will have a huge impact on transforming the future of how our organization delivers health care. Our staff carries out duties in a high-performance organization with a high-performance culture where service to Veterans is our priority," concluded Rivera.

Ultimately Rivera and his leadership team want Veterans and employees to be proud of their health care system, and MyVA will help.

The MyVA initiative is the most sweeping change in the organization since being designated as a cabinet-level executive department in 1988 by President Ronald Reagan, according to the websites <https://myva.va.gov/> and www.va.gov/about_va/vahistory.asp.

PROJECT LEGACY

BUILDING HEALTH CARE



HONORING VETERANS



KEEPING THE PROMISE

By Karla Marshall

While several major construction milestones were completed at the replacement medical center and we are on track to see completion in 2016, much work was done by Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System staff to activate the new medical center once buildings are turned over in FY16.

In the spring we began implementing an overarching plan to ensure we addressed every aspect of working in a new 24/7 hospital setting. SLVHCS Director Fernando O. Rivera charged more than 20 integrated project teams to look at everything from how lab specimens are transported to the process for providing patients medicines.

One team, the Inpatient Medical-Surgical/Intensive Care Unit IPT has been working on what a patient can expect when they are admitted to the new medical center. The team began by mapping out a typical day for that patient and then looked to see what work processes needed to be in place to ensure the patient received the safest, best possible care.

Dr. Michelle Guidry, co-chair of the team, coordinated a visit with a Veteran patient and sat in his hospital room for most of a day, beginning at 5 a.m., to document everything that happened in the patient's room.

"The IPT meetings were mainly focused on global issues that were not Veteran or unit specific," said Guidry. "So the idea was to get the service lines integrated by figuring out what relationships needed to be in place."

Guidry created a flow diagram that gave her IPT a foundation for all of the crosstalk across services.

"It helped us focus on the day-to-day life of what would happen on the unit," Guidry said. "I got a lot of input from the Veteran and it was gratifying to take the time to sit with him and watch how staff interacted with him throughout the day."

The new diagram tool is Veteran focused, unit focused and service integrated, she said.

With this new-garnered information, experts at each focus point can fill in the critical details that support each interaction.

"This is the nuts and bolts work that is absolutely critical to delivering safe and excellent patient care," said Mary Beth Cooper, associate chief nurse for activation.



OCTOBER 2014



OCTOBER 2015

"All of the IPT teams have similar detailed work that they must do in order for us to get it all right."

There will be issues and things the teams didn't think about when they did their planning, but by doing this level of evaluation and even conducting deep dives into processes, we will reduce the likelihood of potential issues, Cooper said.

"I tell the IPTs that what they are doing might not seem critical to the overall mission, but it is," stressed Cooper. "When we dedicate the time to do the difficult work up front, we minimize the unplanned urgencies and stress of moving into the new space."

Abdominal aortic aneurysms: Are you at risk?

By Tyler Grimes

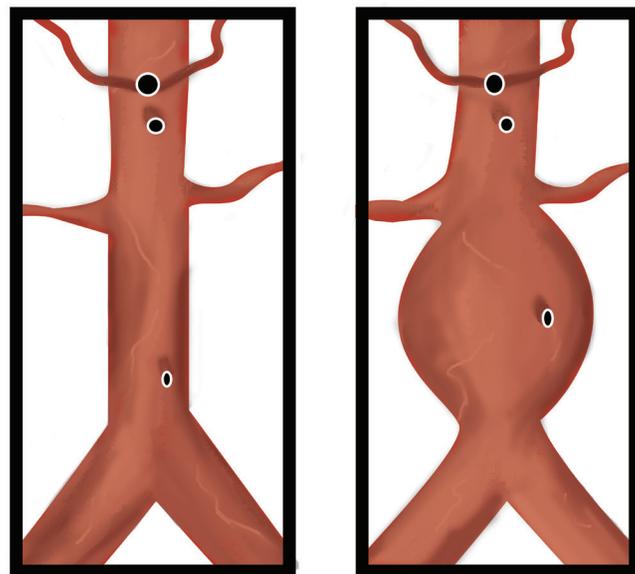
When talking to a health care provider, it is important to discuss any health problems you may be having. One such condition is an abdominal aortic aneurysm, which are relatively frequent among older Veterans, according to Dr. Michael Pappas, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Vascular Surgery chief.

This condition occurs when the areas in the lower part of the aorta, the major blood vessel that supplies blood to the body, become enlarged and can be potentially life-threatening.

“Veterans at greatest risk for AAA are men who are older than 65 years and have peripheral atherosclerotic vascular disease and a history of smoking,” Pappas said. “Most Veterans with AAAs are asymptomatic, and many are detected as incidental findings on diagnostic imaging obtained for other reasons.”

According to the National Library of Medicine, AAAs can progress slowly over the course of many years but the symptoms can occur quickly when the aneurysm expands rapidly, tears open or leaks blood within the wall of the vessel. The symptoms include abdomen or back pain, passing out, dizziness, clammy skin, nausea, vomiting, a rapid heart rate and shock.

Smoking appears to be the greatest risk factor associated with an AAA. Approximately 20 percent of patients with an AAA have a family history. Pappas said that Caucasian



An aneurysm occurs when a weakened part of the aorta wall stretches and expands.

males are generally affected most often and females and African Americans with diabetes mellitus have been known to be associated with AAAs. Other risk factors with AAA include high blood pressure, obesity and high cholesterol. Uncommon causes of AAA include infection, cystic medial necrosis, arteritis, trauma, inherited connective-tissue disorders and anastomotic disruption, which can produce pseudo-aneurysms.

Pappas explains that there are some ways to reduce your risks of an AAA, such as maintaining a healthy diet, regular exercise and tobacco cessation.

For someone with an AAA, the treatment options are tobacco cessation, making healthy lifestyle choices and the use of doxycycline, which is an antibiotic that has been known to decrease the expansion rate of the aneurysm. In some cases, surgery may be necessary as well.

If you are concerned about your risk of an AAA, talk to your doctor. If you would like to learn more about AAAs, <http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/>.

VA announces new rules regarding service animals

By Tyler Grimes

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced Aug. 17 that it has revised its regulation regarding the presence of animals on VA property. The updated regulation will ensure VA practices remain consistent with applicable federal law.

Under the revised regulation, only dogs that are individually trained to perform work or tasks on behalf of an individual with a disability will be considered service animals.

Other animals are not permitted in VA facilities, unless expressly allowed for activities such as animal-assisted therapy or for other reasons, such as law enforcement purposes.

The regulation further confirms that service animals may access VA property subject to the same terms that govern the admission of the public to VA property, and may be restricted from certain areas on VA properties to ensure that patient care, patient safety and infection control standards are not compromised.



VA will not require any proof of a service animal's training or certification for purposes of access. However, for Veterans with a service animal that are receiving treatment in a Veterans Health Administration residential program, records of the service animal's vaccinations will be required.

Veterans Choice Program

The Veterans Choice Program (VCP) is a temporary program to improve Veterans' access to health care by allowing eligible Veterans to use approved health care providers outside of VA.



To find out if you are eligible and to make an appointment call:

866-606-8198

For more information visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



VA

Compensation and Pension Office helps **VETERANS** get the benefits they deserve

By Tyler Grimes

There are many services and resources available at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System to help Veterans with their health care needs, but there is also an office to help Veterans with their benefit claims.

The Compensation and Pension office coordinates medical examinations for Veterans who have military service-connected disability claims with the Veterans Benefits Administration. Dr. Philip Lundy, Compensation and Pension physician manager, oversees the SLVHCS doctors who perform the exams.

“We conduct whatever examinations the regional office of VBA needs to determine a disability rating,” Lundy said.

Veterans who want to make a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs for a service-connected disability can begin the process by going to eBenefits.va.gov and apply online or visiting the New Orleans Regional Benefit Office located at 1250 Poydras St., Suite 200 in New Orleans. Once a Veteran initiates a claim with VBA, the VBA solicits medical records, both military and civilian, that could be used to support the claim, according to Lundy.

“If (VBA) determines that there is something in the Veteran’s service medical record that shows their condition may be related to their military service, then they send a request to us with the examinations,” Lundy said.



“The most rewarding part is when you assist someone who has been waiting for a long time get the compensation they deserve.”

*Felicia Vance,
Compensation and Pension program manager*

Part of his job is to translate the claim request information he receives from VBA into the correct exam template necessary to gather rating information. The entire Veterans Health Administration portion of the Compensation and Pension process can take no more than 30 days to complete, including the exams and submission of a medical report to VBA.

In June 2015, SLVHCS’ average processing time was 24.8 days with one percent returned for insufficient information.

The average processing time for Disability Evaluation System C&P examinations is 22.4 days with zero percent returned for insufficient information.

For Felicia Vance, Compensation and Pension program manager, working with Veterans to get a resolution to their claim is very satisfying.

“The most rewarding part is when you assist someone who has been waiting for a long time get the compensation they deserve,” Vance said.

According to Lundy, many Veterans have multiple disability claims for various conditions, which can all be examined during one appointment.

To learn more about the Compensation and Pension program, call (504) 412-3700, ext. 7185.

Dr. Philip Lundy, Compensation and Pensions physician manager, oversees SLVHCS doctors who perform disability claim exams. (Photo by Hillary Rustine)

SLVHCS meets with Veterans at town halls

By Debra Ceaser-Winbush

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System held town halls for hundreds of Veterans on Aug. 4 at the Houma Municipal Auditorium and on Oct. 6 at the Ponchatoula Community Center.

SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE kicked off the meetings with a presentation about the health care system and services offered at the Houma and Hammond community-based outpatient clinics. He also discussed the Veterans Choice Program and activation of the new medical center. SLVHCS leadership and staff from Health Administration Service, Human Resources Management, Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn Program, Voluntary Service, My HealtheVet and other programs were available to assist Veterans.

“The team at Hammond works really hard to ensure patients get the care they need,” Rivera said. “This meeting is a great way to get feedback from Veterans on their care experiences and hear about how we can make improvements.”

More than 200 people attended the Houma event, including Veterans, their family members, representatives from Senator David Vitter, Senator Bill Cassidy and Louisiana State

Representative Gordon Dove’s offices. In Ponchatoula, there were about 165 people in attendance, including staff from Senator David Vitter and Senator Bill Cassidy’s offices and Louisiana State Representative Stephen Pugh.

“It was great to be here in Houma,” said Rivera. “In many ways, this was like coming home for me, as much of my wife’s family is from Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes.”

Veterans welcomed Rivera and the VA staff at both meetings, but had a lot of questions, too. The questions centered on how the Veterans Choice Act affected Veterans ability to receive care and how things would change for Veterans once the new medical center was finished.

“There will still be outpatient clinics and we will expand services when it makes sense,” Rivera said. “But we are also looking to provide care to more Veterans via virtual health care like telemedicine and secure messaging.”

SLVHCS town hall meetings give Veterans, their families and others an opportunity to meet with VA leaders to ask questions and share any concerns about their health care or benefits.

SLVHCS Medical Center director Fernando Rivera speaks to Veterans at a town hall in Houma, La., on Aug. 4. Rivera talked about the three focus areas for our health care system. (Photo by Anne Marino)



JOB SEEKERS

Continued from page 5

While staff members have been actively engaged in recruitment efforts for several months in preparation of the new 1.6 million square foot medical center, the career fair marks the first recruitment event of such a large scale across the many SLVHCS services.

“This event gave the leaders of our various departments an opportunity to talk to qualified candidates who will help strengthen and complement our current workforce,” Alston said. “It was a great opportunity to tap into the talent in New Orleans and the surrounding communities.”

Alston’s team helped fair-goers search through current vacancies, answer questions about career advancement and employee benefits and create accounts on USAJOBS.gov. In addition to excellent job opportunities and the ability to excel, Alston says health care professionals are well aware of the significance of the VA mission.

“There are many opportunities to pursue various career paths with SLVHCS, while simultaneously supporting our Veterans,” she said. “(Health care professionals) want to support our Veterans and be a part of our new medical center.”

The success of the career fair exceeded the expectations and reinforced the importance of strengthening the SLVHCS workforce, according to Rivera.

“The enthusiasm the applicants showed demonstrates how passionate and excited this community is about serving our Veterans,” he said. “We, in VA, have an honorable mission and good people come to serve that mission.”

Rivera also mentioned that he was very pleased with the turnout among VA employees in support of the event.

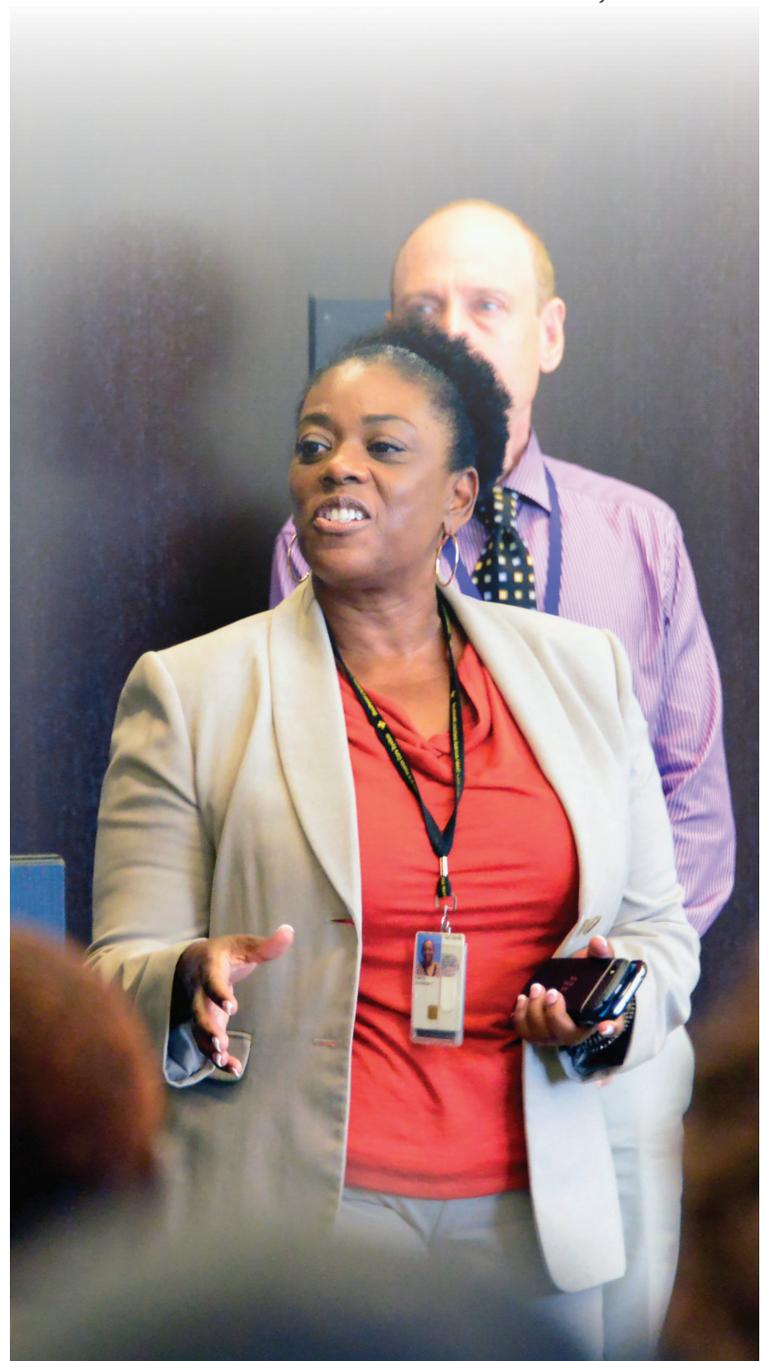
“Their supportive attitude and professionalism helped set a great example of the excellent team and atmosphere we have in our health care system,” he said.

In addition to SLVHCS staff, representatives from the Veterans Benefits Administration, the National Cemetery Administration, the National Recruitment and Retention Center, VA for Vets, and Veterans Service Organizations met with attendees to discuss a wide variety of topics in addition to recruitment.

By the time the crowd had left and the event was over, more

than 1,000 professionals attended, including approximately 150 Veterans. Resumes were collected from more than 300 non-clinical, more than 100 clinical professionals, 64 nurses and three physicians.

Photo by Anne Marino



Patricia Smith, Financial Operations Service chief, speaks with an auditorium full of prospective candidates about job opportunities at SLVHCS' career fair in New Orleans Aug. 3.

Patriot of the Year

Connie Washington

By Chris Cox



Photo by Teresa Jackson

Deputy Chief of Police Connie Washington was named the 2015 Patriot of the Year for her professional and personal contributions to the welfare of Veterans, the New Orleans community and her fellow Southeast Louisiana Health Care System employees.

Of the 1,592 employees currently working within SLVHCS, being chosen as the finest of them is no small achievement. Yet each year one person is selected who exemplifies the finest characteristics of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence. That person is honored with the title of "Patriot of the Year." Washington, who has been a mainstay in the Veterans health care system here, has demonstrated those qualities since 1983, according to the service summary compiled by her supervisor and co-workers. She is the first VA police officer to be chosen as the Patriot of the Year at SLVHCS.

"I began my employment with the VA Police as a patrol officer, the only female at the time," she explained.

"As I worked my way through the ranks, the road was not easy. I have the bumps and bruises to show for my hard work. In a field dominated by men, it only made me stronger."

Over the last three decades, the strength that has grown in Washington has finally put her in a position where she can positively influence more than just those few around her. As deputy chief, she is able to coach, teach and mentor those new faces on the force, as well as those with tenure who are looking for leadership.

"She's a quiet, confident leader. She's a good observer," said SLVHCS police chief Robert Kenyon. These traits are not only a testament to how she has accomplished everything she has done, it is also a predictor of her future success as a lead supervisor.

Outside of uniform, however, Washington has spent much of her personal time taking care of those who need help. Either directly or by organizing groups of volunteers, she has built homes with the St. Bernard Project and Habitat for Humanity; helped deliver donations to New Orleans' homeless community; and has even taken money from her own pocket to help a Veteran in need of a taxi ride home. These examples are only a few out of the many unsung, selfless acts Washington has committed over the years.

"She always takes the lead on volunteer activities involving police in the community and children's Christmas activities,"

Kenyon stated. "She doesn't have to be asked. She just does it."

And when it comes to understanding the needs of Veterans and those who serve them here at the New Orleans VA Medical Center, "She gets it," he said. "She's a great role model."

"I love giving back to those who have given so much," Washington said. "I receive fulfillment in knowing that I have put a smile on someone's face."

Beyond her kindness and compassion after hours, Washington has also gone out of her way to ensure her team's professional success. Not only does she show her fellow police officers how to plan, organize and execute security-related events at the campus on, and immediately surrounding SLVHCS clinics in New Orleans, she also stood in for a time as the acting police chief at the G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Miss., when they needed a professional to fill the gap.

As an example of the kind of dedication SLVHCS needs to continue being the preferred healthcare of choice for Veterans, Washington is this year's icon. She has demonstrated that being a patriot here means more than simply showing up for work. It also requires sharing your time and attention and being dedicated to making us all better together.

"She's a quiet, confident leader. She's a good observer."

Robert Kenyon
SLVHCS police chief



VETERANS!

This flu season, protecting your health with a flu shot is easier than ever — and as close as your **VA**¹ and your neighborhood **WALGREENS!**² **VA** and **WALGREENS** care about your health and are partnering to offer enrolled Veteran patients **EASY ACCESS TO FLU SHOTS**. Shots are still available at your local **VA HEALTH CARE FACILITY**, but with our new partner, **WALGREENS**, you now have greater choices of time and location, all **WITHOUT HAVING TO COMPLETE ANY OTHER VA FORMS**. Walgreens accepts most insurance plans, including Medicare. However, there may be a cost to a VA patient for the flu shot.



To find your closest Walgreens location, go to [Walgreens.com/findastore](https://www.walgreens.com/findastore).
To learn more, go to www.publichealth.va.gov/vaccines.asp.

¹If your local pharmacy is not participating in the VA Retail Immunization Care Coordination Program, it may participate in the future as the program expands. References to Walgreens or other non-VA pharmacies do not constitute or imply VA endorsement of these companies, their services, or products.

²Vaccine subject to availability. State-, age- and health-related restrictions may apply.

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**SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA
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"One Team Creating The Perfect Patient Experience"

Larry Simmons and Phil Donaghey, with Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3267 drop off donations on Oct. 20 for homeless Veterans.



Photo by Chris Cox