

Bonne Santé

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System

Winter 2017-2018



**SLVHCS Stand Down
serves hundreds of
homeless Veterans**

Page 10

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System

From the Director



*Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE
SLVHCS Medical Center
Director/CEO*

Over the last few months, we've reached several milestones at the new Veterans medical center, offering greater health care choices to our Veterans. Since our ribbon cutting in November 2016, we've conducted more than 577,000 outpatient appointments at the new Veterans medical center.

We are excited to now offer 24/7 operations in the Emergency Department, which features 23 exam/treatment rooms with state-of-the-art equipment backed by board-certified health care providers.

We also began performing in-house inpatient dialysis, as well as cardiopulmonary exercise tests, which will be used alongside our new cardiac rehab program to deliver high value care to Veterans.

At the end of the year, our recreational therapy gym opened for our Veterans Day activities, where Chairman of the Board of DAV and

Immediate Past National Commander David Riley was our keynote speaker, followed by a 3v3 wheelchair basketball game with a half-time free throw contest. It was the NOLA VA Rolling Thunder team against the PVA Bayou Hurricanes, led by Bayou Gulf States PVA President Julius Lee. The Bayou Hurricanes defeated the Rolling Thunder 34 – 22, but we're already discussing a rematch! It was a special event aimed at promoting physical activity and healthy living for our nation's heroes.

This past summer, we admitted our first mental health inpatients, opened the optical shop and began endoscopy procedures that allowed gastrointestinal examinations for the first time in the new Veterans medical center.

Early in the fall, to better serve our Veterans, we began 24/7 operations in the urgent care, opened our medicine intensive care unit, admitted our first inpatient to the medicine unit and performed our first operating room outpatient procedure at the Veterans medical center.

In December, we held our first teaching kitchen in our outpatient education resource center and admitted our first extended care resident in the community living center, as well as performed our first in-house cardiopulmonary exercise test. We also held our first Clergy Day, where more than 30 spiritual leaders from the local community came together to better connect with their Veteran population by orienting themselves on resources for Veterans issues from ending Veteran homelessness and suicide prevention to obtaining health care at the new Veterans medical center. This event is just another example of the ways we connect with our communities to improve our Veterans' lives.

You can read more about these and other activities throughout this newsletter.

For more information on these and other happenings throughout our health care system, including the results of our Veterans' creative arts competition that is ongoing and our second annual Ladies Night for female Veterans scheduled for May, follow us on Facebook and Twitter, keyword VANewOrleans.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fernando O. Rivera'.

Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE
SLVHCS Medical Center Director/CEO

Bonne Santé

Winter 2017-2018
Vol. 8, No. 4

Director

Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE

Chief of Staff

Ralph Schapira

Associate Director

Patient Care Services

Brinda Williams-Morgan

Associate Director and Acting Deputy Director

Stephanie Repasky

Chief, Community and Public Relations

Amanda Jones

Authorization

Published under the authority of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Numbered Memorandum 00-1.

Submissions

Story ideas and feedback are accepted at vhanolpublicrelations@va.gov

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On the Cover:

SLVHCS employees and volunteers provided health care to more than 225 Veterans during the 2017 Homeless Veterans Stand Down Oct. 28. Read the story on Page 10!

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Town halls enhance communication with Veterans

By Jeff Nowakowski

Veterans from across southeast Louisiana gathered over the past several months to learn about activations at the new Veterans medical center, receive information on health care benefits and learn about a wide variety of other topics during Veteran town hall meetings.

SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando Rivera began each meeting with a brief presentation on the new medical center, which included updates on the Choice Act, a new website for VA access and quality, and the expanded Veterans service center on the first-floor concourse of the new Veterans medical center.

“We’ve completed several more milestones at the new Veterans medical center and you will be seeing more resources and services coming online as we head into the new year,” said Rivera. “We have wonderful doctors and nurses doing great work and that’s having a great impact on the health care we can offer Veterans.”

“I got the answers I needed at these town hall meetings,” said Army Veteran Jeffrey Williams. “I’m starting to see that VA is getting this hospital pointed in the right direction because this has been very helpful.”

Veterans in other town hall meetings heard about prescription medicine co-pay change and new technologies

Veterans gathered to receive more information on the newly activated services and programs at the new Veterans medical center. (Photo by Anne Marino)

designed to make health care easier for Veterans.

“This helps a lot when VA comes to where we live because not all of us can make into New Orleans every time,” said Air Force Veteran Donald Benowetz. “This was very informative. I want them to come again when they have more information.”

Veterans at each of the town hall meetings expressed their appreciation for the information and pledged to complete the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys they received in the mail.

Veterans' pets get check-ups at Slidell VA clinic

By Chris W. Cox

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System's clinic in Slidell hosted Pets 4 Vets where Veterans brought their four-legged buddies for a healthy check-up, compliments of Banfield Pet Hospital. The volunteers provided dog and cat wellness exams, which included vaccinations, vital stats checks, ear cleaning, and nail clipping.

"He's a service dog," said Army Veteran Rene Dinet about his 4-year-old Chihuahua, Cheeto. "I usually come to see a doctor or a therapist. I don't usually bring him with me. I've had him since he was a puppy."

For many Veterans, their pets provide comfort and a calming influence when things get stressful. Being able to give some of that support, even if it's a simple health care check-up, means a lot.

The Pets 4 Vets event at the clinic was only one of many put on throughout the country. One of the attendees who was at Pets 4 Vets in Slidell was Nicole Keating, a member of the Royal Canin team.



Army Veteran Rene Dinet's service dog, Cheeto, gets his ears and nails cleaned as part of the Pets4Vets veterinary event at the Slidell VA community clinic. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)



Veterans' pets got a free check-up at the Slidell VA community clinic as part of an outreach event by Banfield Animal Hospital. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)

"We have seven ambassadors here from all over the world and we are partnering with local associates from Banfield

hospitals to help pull off these clinics," Keating said. "This is our second clinic in Louisiana. Before that we did three to Puerto Rico."



First medicine inpatient admission at new Veterans medical center

Ronald Giovengo served in Korea during the conflict as a Marine combat engineer and now lives in Mississippi about an hour away from New Orleans. He was the first medicine inpatient admission to the New Orleans Veterans medical center.

Marine Corps Veteran Ronald Giovengo finishes his therapy under Charge Nurse Cheryl Cherry's care at the New Orleans Veterans medical center Oct. 11, 2017. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)

First Veteran patient completes pulmonary rehab in new exercise room

By Jeff Nowakowski

Veteran Louis Richard was the first patient to complete a pulmonary rehabilitation program in the new pulmonary therapy exercise room in the new Veterans medical center.

The pulmonary rehabilitation program was the second phase of a three-part program that Richard completed over a 36-week time period.

Richard, an Army and Air Force Veteran, completed a special set of re-training exercises for breathing because of his chronic lung disease, as well as exercise therapy for his upper and lower body. The program, known as "Second Wind," takes place twice a week in the new pulmonary rehabilitation exercise room located on the third floor of building G at the Veterans medical center.

The 77-year old Richard's next course of treatment is taking place at his home in Chalmette where he follows an exercise and physical therapy regimen via DVD or a printed guide.

An additional 12 Veterans are scheduled to participate in the pulmonary rehabilitation program.



Veteran Louis Richard is presented a certificate from SLVHCS Respiratory Therapist Zina White for being the first patient to complete a pulmonary rehabilitation program in the new pulmonary therapy service. (Photo by Patricia Jefferson)



SLVHCS commemorated POW/MIA Day with the dedication of a new flag and memorial. (Photo by Amanda Jones)

SLVHCS observes National Former POW/MIA Recognition Day

By Jeff Nowakowski

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System commemorated National Former Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Recognition Day, and dedicated a new prisoner of war/missing in action memorial on September 15, the traditional POW/MIA Day.

The ceremony was held at the flagpole near the main entrance of the new Veterans medical center.

“On Recognition Day, we recognize and honor our fallen soldiers who have served our nation and other nations as prisoners of war and confirm our commitment to accounting for all of them who remain missing today,” said past Louisiana American Legion commander Les Cromwell.

The ceremony included the rising of a new POW/MIA flag that was donated by American Legion Post 349.

“We are grateful to the American Legion for partnering with us to hold this important event, and for donating the missing man table so that we shall never forget the men and women who gave up their freedom to protect ours” said SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE.

More than 82,000 Americans remain unaccounted for from World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Gulf War, and other conflicts. Out of that number, the 1,162 Louisiana Veterans who are still considered missing in action were recognized on a display as part of the ceremony.

The ceremony concluded with the dedication of the missing man table and chair, which was also donated by American Legion Post 349, and is now on permanent display on the first-floor concourse inside the new Veterans Medical Center.

Veterans medical center update

By Jeff Nowakowski

Winter 2017 proved to be a quarter of strong progress in activation of additional services and programs in the new Veterans medical center.

While installation of new equipment resulted in better integrated services and improved patient care, it was an intense, time-sensitive planning and implementation effort that allowed some of the most technologically-advanced medicine to be brought online.

MEDICINE

The 3B inpatient and 3C intensive care units began admitting patients in September.

Down the hallway is intensive care unit 3C that is a specialized service unit that will provide specialized care for critically ill patients following surgical procedures.

The activations in the month of September followed a similar busy month in August. The first endoscopy procedures were performed in mid-to late August. Just down the hallway from endoscopy, patients underwent the first interventional pain clinic procedures.

SURGERY

The Surgery Service's operating room performed its first outpatient procedures starting in late September with a total of 12 surgeries being completed over the first couple of weeks. There are a total of eight operating rooms in a unique work flow design complete with state-of-the-art da Vinci robotic surgical system and closed-circuit video feed system to surgical specialists within the VISN 16 system. Despite limited data, the OR utilization and cancellation rates are significantly improved compared to the former ambulatory procedure unit that performed simple surgical procedures.

Working hand-in-hand with surgery has been a drastically expanded and improved anesthesiology service that now includes a first-ever pre-operative clinic that evaluates surgical cases. And for the first time, anesthesiologists are part of the team performing endoscopies and gastrointestinal exams.

NUCLEAR MEDICINE

The nuclear medicine service is now in service following a rigorous inspection protocol of four of the five major scanning instruments that were activated last quarter.

Diagnostic Imaging, of which Nuclear Medicine is one part, took another major step forward as a full-time service.

Two related nuclear gamma cameras for cardiac imaging and positron emission tomography, known as a PET scan, for oncology were activated at the end of the year.



(L to R): Surgical RN Yolanda Washington, Anesthesiology Chief Dr. Armando Ariza Giammaria, Surgery Service Chief Dr. James Smith, Surgical RN Lisa Hoffman, and Surgical RN Darlene Hobbs transfer a patient after surgery in OR number 3 following activation of Surgery Service in September. (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

The most robust Emergency Department (ED) in the history of SLVHCS was fully activated and began providing care in late December on the second floor of Building D.

Our previous Urgent Care clinic was assimilated into the ED as we now focus primarily on stabilizing and treating emergent medical and mental health conditions. For the first time in years, the Emergency Department will accept ambulances transporting patients directly from the community.

The ED features two distinct care areas. The fast track area will provide care for lower acuity conditions such as lacerations, minor infections, sprains and strains. The acute care area will specialize in providing comprehensive emergency care for patients with emergent or urgent illnesses or injuries.

The 10,000-square-foot E.D. has 23 exam/treatment rooms, and can provide patients with prompt diagnostic imaging and laboratory services. The emergency medicine team is expected to provide immediate care to 15,000 to 20,000 Veterans in the first year of operation.

INPATIENT DIALYSIS

The first inpatient dialysis at SLVHCS was performed during the third week in December, and two more have been completed since that time.

Inpatient dialysis is a process performed here in the medical center for patients with some kind of kidney failure.

SLVHCS can now perform two kinds of inpatient dialysis. The inpatient dialysis unit is located on the fourth floor of building C and supports four stations as well as a mobile station that can be used for patients requiring dialysis in the ICU.

Depending on the type of dialysis and the severity of the renal dysfunction, the procedure may take from the traditional three to four hours to ten hours or more.



(L to R): Nuclear Medicine Chief Dr. Jason Samii and Nuclear Medicine Technologist Lisette Garcia-Pearson conduct a bone scan of former Army Veteran Samuel Allen in the newly activated nuclear medicine service in building G. (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)

The inpatient dialysis unit will do a phased expansion from one shift up to three shifts in the second quarter of 2018.

CARDIAC MEDICINE

At almost the same time as the inpatient dialysis was completed, the first transesophageal echocardiography (TEE) test was performed.

TEE is a test that produces high-quality pictures of a patient's heart and blood vessels. These pictures help doctors detect and treat heart and blood vessel diseases and conditions. TEE also can show blood clots that may have caused a stroke.

Unlike many systems, the SLVHCS computer imaging software allows three-dimensional views of heart structures.

A TEE may be done on an outpatient basis or as part of a patient's stay in a hospital. Procedures may vary depending on the patient's condition.

It's expected that TEE testing will increase in volume as the year progresses from referral demand and as the number of inpatients increases.

It is truly an exciting time as SLVHCS's continues to bring back services to our Veterans in a health care facility that is all their own, giving them a greater choice in their care.



Stand Down serves hundreds of homeless Veterans

By Jeff Nowakowski

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, in partnership with several New Orleans community groups, assisted more than 225 Veterans during its Stand Down for Homeless Veterans on October 28.

The Stand Down featured tent displays outside in the horseshoe main entrance to the new Veterans medical center. There were also a number of displays inside the medical center on the first-floor concourse, along with some musical entertainment.

The annual event offered food, clothing, toiletries, household items, haircuts, medical screenings, health care services, legal counseling, and job assistance for homeless Veterans in the greater New Orleans area.

When Veterans walked into the gates of the Stand

Down, they were greeted with a handshake and open arms, coffee and donuts. They were then assigned to an escort who assisted them in accessing the services they needed along the first-floor concourse to the third floor outpatient clinic for medical screenings and then back to the first-floor for military clothing and then outside to the clothing tent, barbers, makeovers, and the comfort of a warm meal at the food tent.

“I’ve never heard of this, but this is the first time I ever came to this,” said Marine Corps Veteran Ernest Thomas. “You are excellent for helping Veterans like me to get back on my feet. I feel better after picking up some new clothes. I hope God blesses every one of you for doing this.”

SLVHCS also provided health care screenings and services such as medical, pharmacy, dental, podiatry and mental health.

“This is great because it got me out of the house and I don’t feel so isolated,” said Navy Veteran Joel Bruce. “Seeing and talking to other Veterans has really reduced my anxiety. I’m not living in darkness today.”

Stand Down is typically a one-day event that provides supplies, services and resources to homeless Veterans as a way to highlight the services offered to Veterans so they can get back on their feet and set the foundation for a successful future. Veterans also received referrals to other assistance such as specialized health care, housing solutions, and employment.

“These Veterans can be considered our most vulnerable population, so we are reaching out to them to offer services that can make a difference to their health and wellbeing,” said SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of SLVHCS, the city of New Orleans and community partners, New Orleans effectively ended Veteran homelessness in 2015 and has been able to maintain a level of functional

zero since then due to events like Stand Down.

Nearly 290 volunteers gave up their time and expertise to lend an ear and a heart to those who served us so well.

“This really opened my eyes about what Veterans are going through,” said volunteer Lawrence Love III. “Today, was my first time helping at Stand Down. I really would like to do more in the future for our Veterans.” Down and I want to do more.”

“It was busy, but organized for the health screenings which the Veterans were very receptive to,” said Pulmonary Medical Support Assistant Antarah Lambert. “The Veterans’ eyes light up when we thank them for their service. It brought tears to my eyes about how they appreciate our service to them.”

The philosophy of a stand down is to give a hand up, not a hand out. A stand down is more than a place to get ... it is a place to belong, once again, to a community.



Photo by Chris W. Cox



Photo by Amanda Jones



Photo by Amanda Jones



Photo by Amanda Jones



SLVHCS celebrates Veterans Day 2017

By Jeff Nowakowski

One of the most anticipated matches of the year – the Rolling Thunder versus the Bayou Hurricanes in a wheelchair basketball game - opened the new SLVHCS recreation center gym on Veterans Day.

The Rolling Thunder, made up of SLVHCS employees, took on the Bayou Hurricanes with an experienced roster of disabled Veterans for a 3-on-3 game.

Both teams were plagued by poor shooting and rebounding in the first quarter, but the Rolling Thunder held the lead at half-time.

The half-time entertainment was filled with a free-throw contest and school children from six local middle schools were recognized for producing handmade thank you cards that were distributed to everyone who attended the day's events.

But at the final buzzer, the Bayou Hurricanes prevailed with a score of 34 to 22.

“Once we got our give-and-go plays going and smashed the boards, we were able to put this game away,” said Bayou Hurricanes

Team members of Rolling Thunder and Bayou Hurricanes celebrate following the 3-on-3 wheelchair basketball game inside the new recreation center. (Photo by Anne Marino)

coach Julius Lee, Paralyzed Veterans of America Bayou Gulf Chapter President.

Rolling Thunder coach SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando O. Rivera said, “there will be a rematch.”

Prior to the game, guest speaker DAV Past National Commander David Riley thanked the SLVHCS staff for the important work they do for Veterans. “I think it’s important for the American public to understand the impact you have in Veterans lives,” said Riley.

Following the game, everyone was treated to lunch by the FBI New Orleans Citizens Academy Alumni Association.

“We are very thankful to partner with the Veterans medical center and be able to help Veterans on this special day,” said FBI New Orleans Citizens Academy Alumni Association Chapter President Leisa Farrar.

SLVHCS celebrates November as Month of the Veteran

By Jeff Nowakowski

During the month of November, we honored the significant contributions made by American service members, their families, and their loved ones. As part of our efforts to answer President Lincoln's charge to care for those who have "borne the battle," SLVHCS conducted a month of observances across Louisiana to honor our Veterans. Below are just a few of the special events that were produced for our Veterans.



Former Marine James McKenzie was in the driver's seat at the new Veterans medical center when he received his flu shot at the drive-thru flu shot clinics that were held in New Orleans and Baton Rouge throughout the month of November. For the first time, Veteran patients and their family members could receive a flu vaccine from the comfort of their vehicle. No one in the drive-thru lane had to walk into the clinic to receive a flu vaccine. Veterans only had to show a valid VA ID card to use the free service. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)



Veterans from all across Baton Rouge were treated to a special luncheon by the Baton Rouge Kiwanis Club in honor of Veterans Day. Kiwanis members served lunch at both the north and south clinics. This was the first time the Kiwanis Club worked on this event at the clinics. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)



The Veterans Canteen Service recognized Veterans Day with a special ceremony of free cake to all Veterans and special guests following some brief remarks by SLVHCS leadership and presentation of certificates to members of each branch of the military services. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)

Vietnam Veteran tries VA medical care after 50-year absence

By Jeff Nowakowski

Sometimes at a clinic visit, it's the simplest request that has the biggest impact on a Veteran patient.

Such is the case of a Vietnam Veteran, medically discharged for life-threatening shrapnel wounds to his mid-section, who walked into the Slidell CBOC and asked if he could simply update his VA identification card. Since Vietnam, he was having trouble with his hearing, so the clinic scheduled a hearing evaluation at the Hammond CBOC. After testing, the audiologist determined the Veteran was almost deaf in his left ear and arranged for him to receive and be fitted with hearing aids.

"I can hear again," said Veteran Tom Holley. "For the first time since Vietnam, I can hear conversations, music, movies, and wind without it all sounding like a screaming mess."

It wasn't easy for Holley to get to this point. It was the first time in almost 50 years that he used VA services. The last time he was in a VA hospital he said he was treated like a number, endured a year of tests for chest/breathing problems and kept enduring the same tests over and over. With

no diagnosis, Holley walked away from VA.

It all began on April 9, 1967 when Holley's artillery unit was subject to a wave of advancing Viet Cong while supporting an operation two miles from the Cambodian border. Holley was a gunner on a 105MM howitzer when a misfired cartridge from artillery piece exploded in an open breach, sending large pieces of the brass canister through his chest and lower abdomen.

A dustoff Huey was able to land during this fire fight

and pick him up to fly to 3rd Surgical Hospital located in the Mei Kong Delta for immediate surgery.

In May 1968, Holley weighed only 87 pounds when he finally left Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, having spent a few months at the 106th General Hospital in Yokohama, Japan.

When he returned to New Orleans, where he was born and raised, he started a career in federal service as a clerk. He progressed in his career, retiring in 2011 as an



Tom Holley, 1967, as a gunner on a 105MM Howitzer at Di An Army base near Saigon. (Photos courtesy of Tom Holley)

intelligence analyst after 45 years of dedicated service.

But it was a chance meeting last year on the set of the TV show NCIS-New Orleans where Holley worked as an extra, when he met other Veterans who used VA services here at the new Veterans medical center.

“The guys told me to see the new hospital, the new faces, and all of the new equipment, so I decided to give the VA a second chance,” said Holley. “Maybe after all these years the VA was worth a second look,” he added.

So he walked into the Slidell CBOC, near where he lives now, and asked if he could update his identification card and maybe check on his hearing.

“Everything was different this time when I went into the VA,” said Holley. “Everyone I dealt with was mission-focused. That’s how customer service should be.”

In fact, Holley was so impressed with the service he received from the Audiology Service at the Hammond CBOC and the Slidell CBOC, he wrote a letter to VA saying “thank you for taking the time to talk with an old ‘Nam Veteran and encouraging me to take action and trust and choose VA.”

VA Chief of Staff Vivieca Wright Simpson later profiled Holley in her monthly Message from the Chief of Staff.



Photos courtesy of Tom Holley

“The outreach efforts and service provided by VA employees established trust and brought a Veteran back to VA after a long absence. The Veteran is now open and willing to talk about how the VA is well-positioned to assist others like himself.”

“Times have changed. People have changed. Services have changed. I’ve changed,” said Holley. “So don’t give up on VA,” he added.

SLVHCS Associate Chief of Staff for Primary Care Wins 2017 Acclaim Award for Health

By Jamie Dannen

Associate Chief of Staff for Primary Care Dr. Jamie Buth has won the Forum for Equality's 2017 Acclaim Award for Health.

The Forum for Equality honored Dr. Buth with the award for her "service to our community and our country, in particular (her) advocacy for transgender Veterans."

"I am grateful to be able to care for our transgender Veterans," said Dr. Buth. "Being different is hard but most hard is to feel unwanted by the system. I appreciate their strength, their determination, and their beauty, and I will always try to provide the care they deserve."

Dr. Buth has been caring for transgender Veterans since 1997. She is a board certified internal medicine specialist and a graduate of St. Louis University Medical School. She holds a master's degree in Health Care Management from the Harvard School of Public Health and is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at Tulane University School of Medicine.

In addition, she is a member of the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH). Last year, she presented a poster on her work at WPATH's 24th Biennial Scientific Symposium in Amsterdam, Netherlands: 'Prevalence & Characteristics of Transsexuals Treated at a Veterans Health Administration Facility in New Orleans.'



Dr. Jamie Buth, Associate Chief of Staff for Primary Care (Photo by Anne Marino)

In 2016, she began to provide care for transgender Veterans in central Louisiana through the Alexandria VA Medical Center.

Dr. Buth is a co-author of a book on transgender health care, "Medical Therapy and Health Maintenance for Transgender Men: A Guide for Health Care Providers."

Dr. Buth has been a resident of New Orleans since 1996.

Congratulations to Dr. Buth on this well-deserved award.

SLVHCS Vitreoretinal Surgeon inducted into 2017 Retina Hall of Fame

By Jeff Nowakowski

SLVHCS Vitreoretinal Surgical Service Chief Dr. James Diamond has been named a charter inductee to the 2017 Retina Hall of Fame for his significant achievements in the practice of vitreoretinal medicine and contributions to the retina subspecialty.

“It is with great humility and honor that I have just been included among many of my colleagues and friends through the years in receiving such prestigious recognition in the advancement of retina care,” said Dr. Diamond.

Dr. Diamond completed his undergraduate training in ophthalmology at Georgetown University Medical School, served as Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Iowa, and Professor and now Emeritus Professor of Ophthalmology at Tulane Medical School.

Dr. Diamond entered the field of ophthalmology at the initial time of development of micro-instrumentation, techniques, treatment and reconstruction of damaged eyes, specifically involving the vitreous, or the jelly-like tissue

inside the human eye between the lens and the retina.

Dr. Diamond was previously inducted into the Retina Society for his thesis on the direct injection of antibiotics and steroids into the eye for infections. He followed this breakthrough with the first systematic approach in the surgical management of cataracta complicata in uveitis. In addition, he was a pioneer in sub-macular surgery with the placement of stem cells for life blinding diseases such as retinitis pigmentosa.

“It is a distinct honor to be allowed to care for fellow Veterans at this fabulous new center and

continue my life dream of teaching residents and fellows,” he added. “I relish this opportunity, and will continue to give every effort possible in the care of these brave men and women for as long as permitted.”

The Retina Hall of Fame (RHOF) recognizes and honors individuals who have dedicated their life’s work in teaching, developing and practicing the subspecialty of retina healthcare. The RHOF endeavors to honor lifetime achievements and contributions of individuals in a variety of clinical disciplines, as well as other areas of research, education and treatment.



Dr. James Diamond uses the new Pascal Micro-pulse laser that allows for wider views of the retina and ability to treat less accessible areas in the eye. (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)

'Active' Anderson is guest speaker at Individuals with Disabilities Observance

By Jeff Nowakowski

Triple amputee Bryan Anderson says you need perseverance and determination to overcome almost any challenge you're faced with.

"You have two choices," he said. "You can crawl into a hole, or you can lead by example and get the job done. A disability will not limit you. All you need is the right mindset. Once you have that, you can accomplish what you want to do."

That was the message he delivered during a special personal appearance at SLVHCS' Individuals with Disabilities observance in October.

In October 2005, Anderson was injured by an Improvised Explosive Device that caused the loss of both legs and his left hand. As a result of his injuries, he received the Purple Heart medal. He is one of only a few triple amputees to have survived his injuries in Iraq.

Anderson has appeared in TV shows, the blockbuster

movie "American Sniper", and authored a book titled *No Turning Back* that was released in 2011. Anderson currently resides in the Chicago area nearby his parents, an identical twin brother and teenage sister. He enjoys challenging his limits by snowboarding, white water rafting, and rock climbing during his free time.

"Getting blown up gave me confidence," said Anderson. "My attitude now is to go and try things. Don't see this as a tragedy, but as just another experience in life."

Prior to his presentation, Anderson toured the Prosthetics Laboratory.

The Individuals with Disabilities observance continued with a tennis workshop by instructors from the Louisiana Tennis Association of Baton Rouge in the new Recreation Center.

Two portable tennis courts were set up and the instructors started with the basic tennis strokes, keeping score, strategy, and



Guest speaker Bryan Anderson
(Photo by Jamie Dannen)

development of technique.

Later that same day, the new recreation center at the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation was formally opened with a single basketball shot by the Paralyzed Veterans of America Bayou Gulf Chapter President Julius Lee.

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service provides services dealing with all aspects of care that allow Veterans to function independently at home and in the community. The recreation center also leads the way in providing leisure activities such as adaptive sports clinics, arts and crafts, and music therapy, and increase local Veterans' participation in National Wheelchair events.

Veteran ‘scrambles’ for new job in teaching kitchen program

By Jamie Dannen

After almost a year, Veteran Michael Brumfield’s hard work is starting to bear fruit – as a full time cook at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

After he got out of the Army, Brumfield came back home to New Orleans, but fell on hard times, and eventually became homeless.

But it was a chance meeting in the CRRC with SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando Rivera that really gave him food for thought.

“I got to talking with the director of the hospital and he said you ought to go to this program we’re setting up,” said Brumfield. “So I went and applied for it and I got accepted.”

Brumfield is the first from a class of six that graduated in December from The Teaching Kitchen.

The Teaching Kitchen is a partnership with SLVHCS, the Greater New Orleans Volunteers of America and the Fresh Food Factor, a program that provides local homeless or at-risk Veterans with culinary job skills that could help them obtain employment in any one of



Veteran Michael Brumfield now works in the SLVHCS inpatient kitchen after graduating from The Teaching Kitchen, a unique partnership between SLVHCS, the Greater New Orleans Volunteers of America, and the Fresh Food Factor. (Photo by Jamie Dannen)

the city’s many restaurants.

“The program was intense and, at times, difficult, but fun,” said Brumfield.

He learned about food preparation, proper handling and storage, clean up before and after cooking, and much more.

“This is New Orleans, there are a million restaurants; why don’t we see if Volunteers of America would be willing to do a class for homeless Veterans,” said Rivera. “If they complete the class and pass the test, they could get a culinary certification that would help them get a job. We were able to secure the funding, identify seven at-risk

Veterans, and then they went through the class.”

Earlier this year, SLVHCS advertised for a full-time position as a cook.

Brumfield applied for the job and got it, and now works in the inpatient kitchen preparing meals for patients and managing food deliveries and many other kitchen related items.

As for getting past homelessness, Brumfield has this advice for Veterans. “You can do it—I was homeless, I didn’t have anywhere to go. I just kept pushing and pushing, and the opportunity came up, and I took it. You just can’t stop trying.”



Get to know your new CLC!

By Jamie Dannen

Veterans, have you heard the news? The community living center at your Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is now open! This 60-bed section of your medical center in downtown New Orleans is beautiful, welcoming, and a long-awaited addition to your new facility.

In case you don't know much about the CLC, let's begin with its mission: to restore each Veteran to his or her highest level of well-being. It's a place where Veterans can receive a nursing home level of care, including help with the activities of daily living (bathing, getting dressed, etc.) and 24-hour skilled nursing and medical care

in a comfortable, not clinical, home-away-from-home setting. It is for anticipated stays of less than 90 days. In other words, the CLC is not a nursing home—it's much more.

Here in New Orleans, your CLC resembles "home" as much as possible. Veterans who stay here are called residents, not patients, and they are offered the opportunity to decorate their individual rooms. Residents live in "households" consisting of 10 bedrooms. Two households make up a neighborhood, with a large shared outdoor patio in between. Residents' families are encouraged to visit as often as possible, and there are multi-purpose

rooms residents can reserve for private gatherings, as well as large open areas for socializing and congregating. There will be a wide variety of activities for residents to enjoy, such as games, crafts, movie nights, gardening on the shared patios, and field trips out of the facility. A dedicated Recreational Therapist will also engage residents in fun activities.

Chief of Geriatrics and Extended Care Dr. Lumie Kawasaki said, "Opening the CLC is such a critical component in our vision for serving older Veterans, particularly those who are frail and medically complex. While our focus may seem to be only on older adults, the concept of frailty goes

Volunteers are an important part of creating the home-like environment for the residents of the CLC.

beyond the chronological age—so we don't limit our care by age.”

Kawasaki and her staff have five priorities for all residents: to engage them in better nutritional habits through food tastings or cooking classes; to support their function, interests, and skill base through activities; to support a restful sleep pattern; to help them manage stress through activities like yoga or music therapy; and to help them evaluate their lives, hopes, and dreams in a way that is helpful and positive.

Nurse Practitioner Hattie Dobson said, “We have a great team, we're all excited for the Vets to come in and stay in our communities. Even though it's a short stay, we're trying to make this feel less like a nursing home or hospital. I think it will be nice to care for a community of people you'll be with long enough to get to know them, to form relationships.”

Dobson wasn't the only CLC staff member excited for the grand opening of the CLC. Extended Care Physician Dr. Fadi Hawawini said, “We haven't had an inpatient facility like this since (Hurricane) Katrina. It's exciting to be part of.”

Many of SLVHCS's Volunteers are also excited to begin helping in the CLC and visiting residents and their families. Volunteers are an important part of creating the home-like environment for the residents of the CLC. The dedicated volunteers will provide companionship, lead and engage in recreational activities with residents, and support Nursing and Nutrition and Food services as needed.

Volunteer Angel Klontz-Calhoun, who comes from a military family, said, “When I contacted Volunteer Services my goal was to be able to work with Veterans directly and make the biggest impact possible. When they told me about the CLC, I knew I wanted to be a part of it because of how hands-on the program is. To me, the CLC here in New Orleans represents what every VA hospital should have to provide the optimum inpatient care and support. I am so excited to work with all the staff in the CLC, because everyone I



Dr. Lumie Kawasaki, Chief of Geriatrics and Extended Care

have met has been so kind and encouraging. Above all, I am most excited to meet and work with the residents. These men and women deserve the absolute best care for the sacrifices that they have made, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to be a part of the CLC. I look forward to my time there.”

CLC resident eligibility is based on clinical need and availability, and Veterans applying to become residents must be enrolled in the VA system and be medically and psychiatrically stable.

To find out more about eligibility, services, copays and other topics, please visit www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/VA_community_living_centers.asp.

Veterans in driving seat with new valet service

By Jeff Nowakowski

When Army Veteran Bill MacKenna arrives at the new Veterans medical center for his weekly outpatient appointment he says there are a lot of cars, vans, and trucks all trying to get near the front entrance.

“It can be a little bit hectic when we get here for his appointment,” said Mary Kay MacKenna Howland. “But this service is wonderful. It’s great to have.”

Since last fall, the MacKennas have used a new valet parking service at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) for their weekly appointment.

SLVHCS now offers complimentary valet parking service to all Veterans, family members and/or visitors who ask for it.

“It’s stressful enough already dealing with Bill’s condition and how hard it is for him to get in and out of a car,” added MacKenna Howland. “Now, with this valet parking service, it’s one less thing I have to be stressed about.”

The new valet parking service is available Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Valet service will receive vehicles up until 4:30 p.m. After 4:30 p.m., there is no parking service, only vehicle retrieval.

There is NO valet service on weekends. Veterans will still be able to self-park on



Valet Service Manager Jasmine Johnson stands ready at the main entrance of the new Veterans medical center to accept the next vehicle for the new valet parking service. (Photo by Chris W. Cox)

weekends or after hours in the patient/visitor garage.

The service is accessible from the drive-in front of the medical center off South Galvez Street.

Valet attendants will perform a joint inspection of the Veteran’s vehicle, issue a claim ticket, park the vehicle, secure the keys, and retrieve the vehicle during valet parking hours.

SLVHCS valet service also offers a unique text-ahead feature. Vehicle owners can text to 504-636-6759 to alert valets in advance of their departure from the medical center, enabling the valet to begin the vehicle retrieval process and reducing patients’ wait time.

If a Veteran’s car was parked using the valet service and Valet is closed when the Veteran comes to retrieve it, Veterans should call Police Service at 504-507-2011. Police Service will verify the Veteran’s claim ticket, return the keys to the driver, and the owner will retrieve the car.

“The valet parking staff are committed to providing safe, reliable and quality service to all our Veterans, patients, families and visitors to the medical center,” said Valet Parking Supervisor Jasmine Johnson.

Tipping for valet service is not permitted.



U.S. Department
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Social Media Compliments



George Beckerman So far nothing but friendly and helpful volunteer folks. Staff too.



Like · Reply



James Scott Everyone is so nice we New Orleans veterans are so lucky to have a wonderful new VA Hospital staffed with great doctors, nurses and staff. All have great sense of humor and are fun to be around. I still can't imagine playing wheelchair basketball against the director Mr Rivera



Like · Reply



Rodney T Brown Just finished my sleep study at VA Hospital in Nawlins & the staff & services were above & beyond outstanding. Thanks so very much!



Like · Reply



Coretta @elegantcoretta

Replying to @DeptVetAffairs @VANewOrleans @DAVHQ

This is my **regional VA**. I have been generally satisfied with it and definitely appreciate the new facilities.



Randy Rich Just started getting cared for here in August, so far care has been first rate, first class professionals, very impressed.



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